



March 29, 2019

VIA ONLINE PORTAL

U.S. General Services Administration
FOIA Requester Service Center (H1F)
1800 F Street NW, Room 7308
Washington, DC 20405-0001
Via FOIAOnline

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Freedom of Information Act Officer:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations of the General Services Administration (GSA), 41 C.F.R. Part 105-60, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

Over two years into the Trump administration, conflicts of interest arising from the first family's business ties remain a substantial issue.¹ For example, amid longstanding concerns surrounding the government lease for Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C.,² GSA's Inspector General recently identified "serious shortcomings" in the agency's decision-making process related to potential constitutional issues for the lease implicated by the November 2016 presidential election.³

American Oversight seeks records with the potential to shed light on the extent Ivanka Trump, reportedly a key negotiator for the Trump Organization, including on the Washington hotel deal,⁴ has been involved in the business both before and after the 2016 election.

¹ See, e.g., Greg Sargent, *The Case Against Trump's Corruption Will Continue to Build*, WASH. POST, Mar. 27, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/03/27/case-against-trumps-corruption-will-continue-build/?utm_term=.f8c5553a9826; Tom Embury-Dennis, *Trump Profiting from Presidency by Selling White House-Branded Merchandise via His 'Trump Store'*, THE INDEPENDENT, Mar. 22, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-white-house-shop-store-merchandise-us-president-a8835361.html>.

² See, e.g., Tess Conciatori, *The Legal Battle Over Trump's D.C. Hotel Could Be Entering Uncharted Territory*, PBS NEWS HOUR (July 23, 2018, 5:21 PM), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/the-legal-battle-over-trumps-d-c-hotel-could-be-entering-uncharted-territory>

³ See Jan Wolf, *U.S. Watchdog Faults Handling of Government Lease for Trump D.C. Hotel*, REUTERS (Jan. 16, 2019, 4:20 PM), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-hotel/u-s-watchdog-faults-handling-of-government-lease-for-trump-d-c-hotel-idUSKCN1PA2WU>.

⁴ See, e.g., Hui-yong Yu, *Trump's \$625-a-Night Washington Hotel Tests Lure of Ivanka Brand*, BLOOMBERG (Sept. 12, 2016, 9:00 AM), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-09-12/trump-s-625-a-night-washington-hotel-tests-lure-of-ivanka-brand>; Monte Burke, *Ivanka Trump's*



Requested Records

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

1. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, and calendar invitations) between (a) the agency officials listed in Column A, below and (b) Ivanka Trump (also known as Ivanka Kushner), including communications from the email addresses or domains listed in Column B, below.

Column A: Agency Officials	Column B: Ivanka Trump Email Addresses and/or Email Domains
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political appointees* in the following offices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Office of the Administrator ○ Federal Acquisition Service ○ Public Buildings Service ○ Office of Communications and Marketing/Office of Strategic Communications ○ Office of the General Counsel • The Regional Administrator for GSA’s National Capitol Region • Any GSA officials responsible for managing the lease agreement between the U.S. Government and Trump Old Post Office LLC,⁵ and any supervisors of such GSA officials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any email address from which Ivanka Trump Kushner was or is communicating ending in any of the following domains⁶: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ @trumporg.com ○ @trump.com ○ @trumphotels.com ○ @ivankatump.com ○ @ijkfamily.com ○ @jkfamily.com ○ @ijkfamily.org ○ @jkfamily.org • imt@who.eop.gov, or any other email address ending in @who.eop.gov from which Ivanka Trump Kushner was or is communicating • Any other email address from which a GSA official listed in Column A knows Ivanka Trump Kushner to have been communicating

Big Role in the Trump Organization, Forbes (Mar. 22, 2016, 12:58 PM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/monteburke/2016/03/22/ivanka-trumps-big-role-in-the-trump-organization/#6c1b405b2a5a>.

⁵ General Services Administration, *Ground Lease, By and Between The United States of America (as “Landlord”) and Trump Old Post Office LLC (as “Tenant”) (GS-LS-11-1307)*, Aug. 5, 2013, www.gsa.gov/portal/content/305477.

⁶ To be clear, if GSA (including any of the officials listed in Column A) is aware of specific email addresses for Ivanka Trump Kushner for any of the email domains listed, American Oversight has no objection to GSA limiting its search to that specific email address for the domain in question.

2. All hard copy records reflecting correspondence (including letters, notes, memoranda, agreements, and notes or summaries of any oral communications) between Ivanka Trump and any of the agency officials listed in Column A, above.

For both parts of this request, please provide all responsive records from August 5, 2013, through 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.

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.⁷ **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.**⁸

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 GSA’s prior FOIA practices unreasonable. **In light of the government-wide requirements to manage**

⁷ 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).

⁸ 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)).

information electronically by the end of 2016, it is no longer reasonable to rely exclusively on custodian-driven searches.⁹ 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 GSA's archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insists that you 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.”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ 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.”¹² 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.’”¹³

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.¹⁴ 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.

⁹ 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>.

¹⁰ FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114-185).

¹¹ *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

¹² *King v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223–24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphases in original).

¹³ *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)).

¹⁴ *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

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, GSA 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, 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, GSA and American Oversight 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 41 C.F.R. § 105-60.305-13, 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.¹⁵ Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.¹⁶

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 activities and operations.¹⁷ The requested records are directly related to GSA’s operations and activities for a lease of one its properties to an external organization. There is significant public interest in conflicts of interest arising from the business interests of the president and his family members working within the administration,¹⁸ and the public’s understanding of the government’s activities would be enhanced through American Oversight’s analysis and publication of these records.

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

¹⁵ 41 C.F.R. § 105-60.305-13(a).

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ 41 C.F.R. § 105-60.305-13(a)(1)–(3).

¹⁸ *See, e.g.,* Sargent, *supra* note 1; Embury-Dennis, *supra* note 1; Abha Bhattarai & Drew Harwell, *Ivanka Trump Shuts Down Her Namesake Clothing Brand*, WASH. POST, July 24, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2018/07/24/ivanka-trump-shuts-down-her-namesake-clothing-brand/?utm_term=.f6364c47f653.

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.¹⁹ 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,²⁰ 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.²¹ 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.²²

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.

Sincerely,



Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight

¹⁹ American Oversight currently has approximately 12,200 page likes on Facebook, and 54,200 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2019); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Mar. 29, 2019).

²⁰ *DOJ Records Relating to Solicitor General Noel Francisco's Recusal*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>.

²¹ *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>.

²² *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>.