



July 24, 2019

VIA EMAIL & FAX

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Freedom of Information Officer
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1600 Clifton Road NE
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FOIARequests@cdc.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear FOIA Officers:

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

In the past two years, Ballard Partners has rapidly established itself as one of the most influential lobbying firms in Washington, D.C., during the era of the Trump administration. The firm has signed more than one hundred clients, both foreign and domestic, and has brought in approximately \$28 million in revenue.¹ Reports indicate that Ballard Partners has achieved this financial success through its connections to the Trump

¹ Anna Massoglia & Karl Evers-Hillstrom, *Revolving Door Brings Trump-Tied Lobbying Firm Even Closer to the White House*, OPENSECRETS, Jan. 22, 2019, <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2019/01/ballard-partners-revolving-door-white-house/>.



administration.² And, public records show that Ballard Partners has had extensive, and perhaps unparalleled, engagement with dozens of federal agencies in its lobbying efforts.³

American Oversight seeks records to shed light on the degree and nature of influence that Ballard Partners is having on the decision-making of the federal government, and particularly on the decisions and actions of this administration's political appointees.

Requested Records

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

All records reflecting communications (including email messages, email attachments, calendar invitations or entries, memoranda or background material for meetings) between the officials specified below and any employee or representative of Ballard Partners⁴ (including communications with email addresses ending @ballardfl.com).

To be clear, this request includes any memos or one-pagers provided by Ballard Partners to government officials during meetings.

American Oversight requests responsive communications from the following officials at your agency:

Department of Health and Human Services:

- i. Alex Azar, Secretary
- ii. Tom Price, former Secretary
- iii. Eric Hargan, Deputy Secretary
- iv. Anyone serving as Chief of Staff to the Secretary

² Fredreka Schouten, *Millions Flow to Fast-Growing Lobbying Firms with Ties to the Trump Administration*, USA TODAY (May 17, 2018, 6:01 PM), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/05/17/lobbyists-ties-donald-trump-mike-pence-make-millions-fees/618765002/>; Theodoric Meyer, *The Most Powerful Lobbyist in Trump's Washington*, POLITICO, Apr. 2, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/04/02/most-powerful-lobbyist-in-trump-washington-217759>.

³ See Ballard Partners, Firm profile: Agencies 2018, OPENSECRETS.ORG, <https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/firmagns.php?id=D000037635&year=2018>.

⁴ Brian Ballard, Sylvester Lukis, Susan "Susie" Wiles, Dan McFaul, Rebecca Benn, Justin Sayfie, James "Jamie" Rubin, Otto Reich, Raj Shah, Pam Bondi, Robert Wexler, Jose Felix Diaz, Katherine San Pedro, Karl Bowers, Sara Pennington, Hannah Walters, and Sara Nuvy are the publicly-identified representatives and lobbyists of Ballard Partners.

- v. Anyone serving as Counselor, Senior Counselor, or Senior Advisor in the immediate office of the Secretary
- vi. Anyone serving as White House Liaison or White House Advisor
- vii. Anyone serving as Director, Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services:

- i. Seema Verma, Administrator
- ii. Anyone serving as Chief of Staff to the Administrator
- iii. Paul Mango, Chief Principal Deputy Administrator and Chief of Staff
- iv. Brady Brookes, Deputy Administrator and Deputy Chief of Staff
- v. Kimberly Brandt, Principal Deputy Administrator for Policy and Operations
- vi. Demetrios Kouzoukas, Principal Deputy Administrator for Medicare and Director, Center for Medicare
- vii. John Brooks, Principal Deputy Director, Center for Medicare
- viii. Elizabeth Richter, Deputy Director, Center for Medicare
- ix. Cheri Rice, Deputy Director, Center for Medicare
- x. Adam Boehler, Deputy Administrator for Innovation Policy and Director, Center for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation
- xi. Amy Bassano, Deputy Director, Center for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation
- xii. Arrah Tabe-Bedward, Deputy Director, Center for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation
- xiii. Calder Lynch, Acting Deputy Administrator and Director, Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services
- xiv. Karen Shields, Deputy Director, Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services
- xv. Alec Aramanda, Acting Director, Office of Legislation
- xvi. Jennifer Boulanger, Deputy Director, Office of Legislation

Food and Drug Administration:

- i. Norman Sharpless, Acting Commissioner of Food and Drugs
- ii. Scott Gottlieb, former Commissioner of Food and Drugs
- iii. Anyone serving as Chief of Staff to the Commissioner
- iv. Paul Howard, Senior Advisor to the Commissioner
- v. Mitchell Zeller, Director, Center for Tobacco Products
- vi. Anyone serving as Chief of Staff to the Director of the Center for Tobacco Products

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- i. Robert Redfield, Director

- ii. Anne Schuchat, Principal Deputy Director
- iii. Anyone serving as Chief of Staff to the Director
- iv. Anyone serving as Deputy Director for Non-Infectious Diseases
- v. Anyone serving as Director for the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
- vi. Anyone serving as Director of the Office on Smoking and Health

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

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and your agency's 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 a better understanding of relevant government procedures by the general public in a significant way. 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 operations or activities of the government."⁵ The public has a significant interest in understanding how much access political appointees and high-ranking officials in the Trump administration have afforded to a lobbying firm with strong connections to the administration.⁶ The lobbying firm Ballard Partners has disclosed that your agency has been a subject of its lobbying efforts in public reports,⁷ and records with the potential to shed light on the influence that this powerful lobbying firm has had on agency decisions and actions and would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the federal government, including whether and to what extent leaders of your agency have been influenced by the concerns of Ballard Partners' lobbying clients in making agency decisions. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses agencies provide to FOIA requests publicly available, 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.⁸ As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the

⁵ 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

⁶ See Massoglia & Evers-Hillstrom, *supra* note 1; Schouten *supra* note 2.

⁷ See Ballard Partners, Firm profile: Agencies 2017, OPENSECRETS.ORG, <https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/firmagns.php?id=D000037635&year=2017>; Ballard Partners, Firm profile: Agencies 2018, OPENSECRETS.ORG, <https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/firmagns.php?id=D000037635&year=2018>.

⁸ See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

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.⁹

American Oversight has also demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content through numerous substantive analyses posted to its website.¹⁰ Examples reflecting this commitment to the public disclosure of documents and the creation of editorial content include the posting of records related to an ethics waiver received by a senior Department of Justice attorney and an analysis of what those records demonstrated regarding the Department's process for issuing such waivers;¹¹ posting records received as part of American Oversight's "Audit the Wall" project to gather and analyze information related to the administration's proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border, and analyses of what those records reveal;¹² posting records regarding potential self-dealing at the Department of Housing & Urban Development and related analysis;¹³ posting records and analysis relating to the federal government's efforts to sell nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia;¹⁴ posting records and analysis regarding the Department of Justice's decision in response to demands from Congress to direct a U.S. Attorney to undertake a wide-ranging review and make

⁹ American Oversight currently has approximately 12,200 page likes on Facebook and 54,400 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited July 3, 2019); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited July 3, 2019).

¹⁰ News, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

¹¹ DOJ Records Relating to Solicitor General Noel Francisco's Recusal, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>; 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>.

¹² See generally *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>; see, e.g., *Border Wall Investigation Report: No Plans, No Funding, No Timeline, No Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/border-wall-investigation-report-no-plans-no-funding-no-timeline-no-wall>.

¹³ Documents Reveal Ben Carson Jr.'s Attempts to Use His Influence at HUD to Help His Business, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/documents-reveal-ben-carson-jr-s-attempts-to-use-his-influence-at-hud-to-help-his-business>.

¹⁴ Investigating the Trump Administration's Efforts to Sell Nuclear Technology to Saudi Arabia, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigating-the-trump-administrations-efforts-to-sell-nuclear-technology-to-saudi-arabia>.

recommendations regarding criminal investigations relating to the President's political opponents and allegations of misconduct by the Department of Justice itself and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.¹⁵

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

Guidance Regarding the Search & Processing of Requested Records

In connection with its request for records, American Oversight provides the following guidance regarding the scope of the records sought and the search and processing of records:

- Please search all locations and systems likely to have responsive records, regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. For instance, if the request seeks “communications,” please search all locations likely to contain communications, including relevant hard-copy files, correspondence files, appropriate locations on hard drives and shared drives, emails, text messages or other direct messaging systems (such as iMessage, WhatsApp, Signal, or Twitter direct messages), voicemail messages, instant messaging systems such as Lync or ICQ, and shared messages systems such as Slack.
- 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 for records includes any attachments to those records or other materials enclosed with those records when they were previously transmitted. To the extent that an email is responsive to our request, our request includes all prior messages sent or received in that email chain, as well as any attachments to the email.
- Please search all relevant records or systems containing records regarding agency business. Do not exclude records regarding agency business contained in files, email accounts, or devices in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts or text messages. Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Federal

¹⁵ *Sessions' Letter Shows DOJ Acted On Trump's Authoritarian Demand to Investigate Clinton*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/sessions-letter>.

Records Act and FOIA.¹⁶ 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, by intent or through negligence, failed to meet their obligations.¹⁷

- Please use all tools available to your agency to conduct a complete and efficient search for potentially responsive records. Agencies are subject to government-wide requirements to manage agency information electronically,¹⁸ and many agencies have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies. These systems provide options for searching emails and other electronic records in a manner that is reasonably likely to be more complete than just searching individual custodian files. For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but your agency's archiving tools may capture that email under Capstone. At the same time, custodian searches are still necessary; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.
- 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 a request is denied in whole, please state specifically why it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.
- Please take appropriate steps to ensure that records responsive to this request are not deleted by the agency before the completion of processing for this request. If records potentially responsive to this request are likely to be located on systems where they are subject to potential deletion, including on a scheduled basis, please take steps to prevent that deletion, including, as appropriate, by instituting a litigation hold on those records.

¹⁶ 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).

¹⁷ See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016).

¹⁸ 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>.

Conclusion

If you have any questions regarding how to construe this request for records or believe that further discussions regarding search and processing would facilitate a more efficient production of records of interest to American Oversight, please do not hesitate to contact American Oversight to discuss this request. 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 and your agency can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

Where possible, please provide responsive material in an electronic format by email. Alternatively, please provide responsive material in native format or in PDF 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.

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, please contact Dan McGrath at foia@americanoversight.org or 202.897.4213. 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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Austin R. Evers", with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight