



September 21, 2020

**VIA ONLINE PORTAL/EMAIL**

Douglas Hibbard  
Chief, Initial Request Staff  
Office of Information Policy  
Department of Justice  
441 G Street NW, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20530  
Via Online Portal

Valerie H. Yancey  
FOIA Officer and Executive Officer  
Office of the Solicitor General  
Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Room 6627  
Washington, DC 20530  
[OSGFOIA@usdoj.gov](mailto:OSGFOIA@usdoj.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, 28 C.F.R. Part 16, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

Soon after the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, President Trump signaled his intention to name a new nominee to the high court, saying that he intends the nomination and vetting process to “move very quickly.”<sup>1</sup> Numerous news reports have indicated that Kate Todd, Deputy Assistant and Counsel to the President, is among the most likely potential nominees.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Veronica Stracqualursi & Jim Acosta, *Trump on Supreme Court Nominee ‘It Will Be a Woman’*, CNN (Sept. 19, 2020, 8:31 PM), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/19/politics/trump-ruth-bader-ginsburg-vacant-seat-fill/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Carrie Johnson & Tamara Keith, *Sources: Trump Considers Barrett, Lagoa, Rushing for Supreme Court Spot*, NPR (Sep. 19, 2020, 7:28 PM), <https://www.npr.org/sections/death-of-ruth-bader-ginsburg/2020/09/19/914829456/sources-trump-considers-coney-barrett-lagoa-thapar-for-supreme-court-spot>; Peter Baker & Maggie Haberman, *Trump and Democrats Brace for Showdown over Supreme Court Seat*, N.Y. Times (Sept. 21, 2020, 7:00 AM), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/20/us/politics/trump-supreme-court-rbg.html>.



Given the enormous national importance of and public interest in the background of the next nominee to the Supreme Court, American Oversight seeks records shedding light on Ms. Todd's actions in her role as Deputy Assistant and Counsel to the President.

### **Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that the Department of Justice produce the following records within twenty business days:

1. All email communications (including email messages, email attachments, complete email chains, calendar invitations, and calendar attachments) between by (a) any of the government officials listed below, and (b) Kate Todd, Deputy Assistant and Counsel to the President, including any of her email addresses ending in @who.eop.gov.

### **Specified DOJ Officials**

- i. Office of the Attorney General
  - A. William Barr, Attorney General, or anyone communicating on his behalf, such as an assistant or scheduler
  - B. Anyone serving as Chief of Staff to the Attorney General
  - C. Anyone serving in the role of White House Liaison
  - D. Anyone serving as Counselor to the Attorney General
- ii. Office of the Deputy Attorney General
  - A. Jeffrey Rosen, Deputy Attorney General, or anyone communicating on his behalf, such as an assistant or scheduler
  - B. Anyone serving as Chief of Staff to the Deputy Attorney General
  - C. Anyone serving as Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General
- iii. Office of the Associate Attorney General
  - A. Anyone serving as Associate Attorney General
  - B. Claire McCusker Murray, Principal Deputy Associate Attorney General, or anyone communicating on her behalf, such as an assistant or scheduler
  - C. Jesse Panuccio, former Principal Deputy Associate Attorney General
  - D. Anyone serving as Chief of Staff to the Associate Attorney General
  - E. Anyone serving as Chief of Staff to the Principal Deputy Associate Attorney General
  - F. Anyone serving as Deputy Associate Attorney General

- iv. Office of Legal Policy
  - A. Beth Williams, Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Legal Policy, or anyone communicating on her behalf, such as an assistant or scheduler
  - B. Anyone serving as Associate Deputy Attorney General for the Office of Legal Policy
  - C. Anyone serving as Nominations Counsel
  - D. Anyone serving as Senior Nominations Counsel
  - E. Anyone serving as Deputy Assistant Attorney General responsible for nominations work
  - F. Anyone serving as Chief of Staff for the Office of Legal Policy
- v. Office of the Solicitor General
  - A. Noel Francisco, Solicitor General, or anyone communicating on his behalf, such as an assistant or scheduler
  - B. Jeffrey Wall, Principal Deputy Solicitor General, or anyone communicating on his behalf, such as an assistant or scheduler

2. All email communications (including email messages, email attachments, complete email chains, calendar invitations, and calendar attachments) sent by (a) any of the government officials listed above and (b) including any of the following specified terms.

Specified Terms

- i. “Kate Todd”
- ii. “Comerford Todd”
- iii. “Kathryn Todd”
- iv. “Deputy White House Counsel”
- v. “Deputy WH Counsel”

Please provide all responsive records from December 4, 2018, 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.”<sup>3</sup> The public has a significant interest in communications between the Department of Justice and potential

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<sup>3</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

Supreme Court nominee Kate Todd. Records with the potential to shed light on this issue would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the federal government, including about what topics Kate Todd communicated with the Department of Justice. 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

American Oversight has also demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content through regular substantive analyses posted to its website.<sup>6</sup> Examples reflecting this commitment to the public disclosure of documents and the creation of editorial content include the posting of records related to the Trump Administration's contacts with Ukraine and analyses of those contacts;<sup>7</sup> posting records and editorial content about the federal government's response to the Coronavirus pandemic;<sup>8</sup> 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;<sup>9</sup> the posting of records related to an ethics waiver

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<sup>4</sup> See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

<sup>5</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 15,600 page likes on Facebook and 105,400 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Sept. 21, 2020); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Sept. 21, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> See generally *News*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

<sup>7</sup> *Trump Administration's Contacts with Ukraine*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-contacts-with-ukraine>.

<sup>8</sup> See generally *The Trump Administration's Response to Coronavirus*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-response-to-coronavirus>; see, e.g., *CDC Calendars from 2018 and 2019: Pandemic-Related Briefings and Meetings*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/cdc-calendars-from-2018-and-2019-pandemic-related-briefings-and-meetings>.

<sup>9</sup> 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,

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;<sup>10</sup> and posting records and analysis of federal officials' use of taxpayer dollars to charter private aircraft or use government planes for unofficial business.<sup>11</sup>

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:

- 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 Records Act and FOIA.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

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<https://www.americanoversight.org/border-wall-investigation-report-no-plans-no-funding-no-timeline-no-wall>.

<sup>10</sup> *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>.

<sup>11</sup> *See generally Swamp Airlines: Chartered Jets at Taxpayer Expense*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/swamp-airlines-private-jets-taxpayer-expense>; *see, e.g., New Information on Pompeo's 2017 Trips to His Home State*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/new-information-on-pompeos-2017-trips-to-his-home-state>.

<sup>12</sup> *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).

<sup>13</sup> *See Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016).

- 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,<sup>14</sup> 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.

## **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

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<sup>14</sup> 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>.

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 Khahilia Shaw at [foia@americanoversight.org](mailto:foia@americanoversight.org) or (202) 539-6507. 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 that reads "Austin R. Evers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

Austin R. Evers  
Executive Director  
American Oversight