



December 10, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Lauren Downey
Public Information Coordinator
Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, TX 78711-2548
publicrecords@texasattorneygeneral.gov

Re: Public Information Request

Dear Ms. Downey:

Pursuant to the Texas Public Information Act, as codified at Tex. Code ch. 552, American Oversight makes the following request for public records.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that the Office of the Attorney General of Texas promptly produce the following:

All text messages (or messages on similar applications such as Signal or WhatsApp) between 1) any of the Texas officials listed below and 2) any of the other individuals listed below.

Texas Officials

- a. Attorney General Ken Paxton, or anyone communicating on his behalf, such as a scheduler or assistant.
- b. First Assistant Attorney General Brent Webster
- c. Deputy Attorney General for Legal Strategy Aaron Reitz
- d. Solicitor General Kyle Hawkins

Other Individuals

- i. Lawrence (Larry) Joseph
- ii. Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt
- iii. Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall
- iv. Arkansas Attorney General Leslie Rutledge
- v. Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody
- vi. Indiana Attorney General Curtis Hill
- vii. Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt
- viii. Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry
- ix. Mississippi Attorney General Lynn Fitch
- x. Montana Attorney General Tim Fox
- xi. Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson



- xii. North Dakota Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem
- xiii. Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Hunter
- xiv. South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson
- xv. South Dakota Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg
- xvi. Tennessee Attorney General Herbert Slattery
- xvii. Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes
- xviii. West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey
- xix. Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr
- xx. Senator Ted Cruz
- xxi. Chief of Staff to Senator Cruz, Steve Chartan
- xxii. Senator John Cornyn
- xxiii. Chief of Staff to Senator Cornyn, Beth Jafari

Please provide all responsive records from November 3, 2020, through the date the search is conducted.

American Oversight insists that the Office of the Attorney General 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; governmental authorities may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.**

Please search all records regarding official business. **You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts.** Emails conducting government business sent or received on the personal account of a governmental authority's officer or employee constitutes a record for purposes of the Texas Public Information Act.¹

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. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically that 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 your office 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.

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

¹ Tex. Code § 552.002(a-2); see also *Adkisson v. Paxton*, 459 S.W.3d 761, 773 (Tex. App. 2015).

or duplication costs. By working together at the outset, American Oversight and your office 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 Tex. Code § 552.267(a), American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records because such a waiver “is in the public interest because providing the copy of the information primarily benefits the general public.” The public has a strong interest in the lawsuit filed by Attorney General Paxton against the states of Georgia, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, asking the Supreme Court to block these states from voting in the Electoral College.² The requested records would shed light on whether and to what extent Attorney General Paxton communicated or coordinated with individuals or officials outside of the Texas government regarding litigation aimed at undermining the 2020 election.

Release of the requested records will primarily benefit the public.³ As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the requested records is not in American Oversight’s financial interest, but is rather in the public interest. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses governmental authorities provide to public records requests publicly available. As noted, the subject of this request is a matter of public interest, and the public would benefit from an enhanced understanding of the government’s activities through American Oversight’s analysis and publication of these records. 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.⁴

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.⁵ Examples reflecting this commitment to the public disclosure of documents and

² See, e.g., Emma Platoff, *In New Lawsuit, Texas Contests Election Results in Georgia, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania*, Tex. Trib., Dec. 8, 2020, <https://www.texastribune.org/2020/12/08/texas-ken-paxton-election-georgia/>.

³ Tex. Code § 552.267(a).

⁴ American Oversight currently has approximately 16,400 followers on Facebook and 105,900 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Dec. 9, 2020); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Dec. 9, 2020).

⁵ *News*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

the creation of editorial content include the posting of records related to the organization's State Accountability Project covering voting rights issues in various states;⁶ the posting of records related to the Trump Administration's contacts with Ukraine and analyses of those contacts;⁷ posting records and editorial content about the federal government's response to the Coronavirus pandemic;⁸ 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;⁹ 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;¹⁰ and posting records and analysis of federal officials' use of taxpayer dollars to charter private aircraft or use government planes for unofficial business.¹¹

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver. If your office denies our request for a fee waiver, please notify American Oversight of any anticipated fees or costs in excess of \$40 prior to incurring such costs or fees.

Conclusion

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with the Office of the Attorney General on this request. If you do not understand any part of this request, have any questions, or foresee any problems in fully

⁶ *State Accountability Project*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/areas-of-investigation/state-local-investigations>.

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

⁸ 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>.

⁹ 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>.

¹⁰ *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>.

¹¹ 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>.

releasing the requested records, please contact Emma Lewis at foia@americanoversight.org or 202.919.6303. 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 stroke extending to the left.

Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight