August 19, 2021

VIA FOIAONLINE

William Holzerland
U.S. Department of the Interior
MS-7328, MIB
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240
Via FOIA Online

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear FOIA Officer:

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.

On January 6, 2021, then-President Trump incited a mob to attack Congress while they were certifying the election for then-President-elect Joe Biden.¹ The insurrectionists attacked the Capitol, forced their way past understaffed Capitol Police, and ultimately delayed the Congressional session as the mob forced lawmakers and their staffs to flee.² During this assault, five people died.³

While militia members roamed Congressional halls, Trump reportedly fought against deploying the D.C. National Guard,⁴ and the Defense Department reportedly initially denied a request, before later reversing the decision.⁵ Congress was able to certify the election.

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⁴ Maggie Haberman (@maggieNYT), Twitter (Jan. 6, 2021, 8:18 PM), https://twitter.com/maggieNYT/status/1346989618239926273 (“NEW: Trump initially rebuffed and resisted requests to mobilize the National Guard, according to a person with knowledge of the vents. It required intervention from White House officials to get it done, according to the person with knowledge of the events.”).
⁵ Aaron C. Davis (@byaaroncdavis), Twitter (Jan. 6, 2021, 2:55 PM), https://twitter.com/byaaroncdavis/status/1346908166030766080 (“BREAKING: A
win for now-President Joe Biden only later in the evening after Capitol Police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Guard, Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), and other law enforcement officials reclaimed the Capitol.  

American Oversight seeks records reflecting the roles that senior officials played during this attack on American democracy and the peaceful transfer of power.

**Requested Records**

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

1. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, complete email chains, and calendar invitations) sent or received on January 6, 2021, by the former agency officials listed below.
   
   a. David Bernhardt, Secretary of the Interior
   b. Katherine MacGregor, Deputy Secretary of the Interior or anyone serving in the capacity of MacGregor’s Chief of Staff or assistant
   c. Todd Willens, Chief of Staff
   d. Anyone then serving as White House Liaison

2. All text messages or messages on messaging platforms (such as Slack, GChat or Google Hangouts, Lyne, Skype, Twitter direct messages, Facebook messages, WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, or Parler) sent or received on January 6, 2021, by the former agency officials listed below:
   
   a. David Bernhardt, Secretary of the Interior
   b. Katherine MacGregor, Deputy Secretary of the
   c. Todd Willens, Chief of Staff
   d. Anyone then serving as White House Liaison

**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.

source tells me The Defense Department has just denied a request by DC officials to deploy the National Guard to the US Capitol.”

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.” The public has a significant interest in the decision-making process that drove the federal government’s preparation and response to an insurrection attempt at the nation’s Capitol Building. Records with the potential to shed light on this matter would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the federal government, including what threats were previously identified and how the federal government had anticipated responding. 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. 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.

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. 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; posting records and editorial content about the federal government’s response to the Coronavirus pandemic; posting records received as part of American Oversight’s

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13 See generally The Trump Administration’s Response to Coronavirus, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-
“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; 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; and posting records and analysis of federal officials’ use of taxpayer dollars to charter private aircraft or use government planes for unofficial business.

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

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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 Records Act and FOIA. 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.

▪ 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, 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.

Mgmt. & Budget, Exec. Office of the President, Memorandum for the Heads of
Executive Departments & Independent Agencies, “Managing Government Records
• 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 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 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,

_/s/ Emma Lewis_
Emma Lewis
on behalf of
American Oversight