



August 19, 2021

**VIA FOIA ONLINE**

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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> During this assault, five people died.<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> Press Release, *Romney Condemns Insurrection at U.S. Capitol*, Office of Sen. Mitt Romney, Jan. 6, 2021, <https://www.romney.senate.gov/romney-condemns-insurrection-us-capitol>.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Tan, et al., *Trump Supporters Storm U.S. Capitol, With One Woman Killed and Tear Gas Fired*, Wash. Post (Jan. 7, 2021, 12:30 AM), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trump-supporters-storm-capitol-dc/2021/01/06/58afc0b8-504b-11eb-83e3-322644d82356\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trump-supporters-storm-capitol-dc/2021/01/06/58afc0b8-504b-11eb-83e3-322644d82356_story.html).

<sup>3</sup> Eric Levenson, *What We Know About the 5 Deaths in the Pro-Trump Mob that Stormed the Capitol*, CNN (updated Jan. 8, 2021, 5:29 PM), <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/07/us/capitol-mob-deaths/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> 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.”).

<sup>5</sup> Aaron C. Davis (@byaarondavis), Twitter (Jan. 6, 2021, 2:55 PM), <https://twitter.com/byaarondavis/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.<sup>6</sup>

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, Lync, 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.

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

<sup>6</sup> Kristina Peterson & Siobhan Hughes, *Congress Reconvenes to Finish Certifying Biden's Electoral College Win*, Wall St. J. (Jan. 7, 2021, 12:55AM), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/congress-aims-to-resume-certifying-bidens-electoral-college-win-11609977260>.

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>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</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>10</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>11</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>12</sup> posting records and editorial content about the federal government’s response to the Coronavirus pandemic;<sup>13</sup> posting records received as part of American Oversight’s

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<sup>7</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Salvanto et al, *CBS News Poll: Still More to Learn About January 6, Most Americans Say*, CBS News (July 20, 2021, 5:00 PM), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/january-6-opinion-poll/>.

<sup>9</sup> See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

<sup>10</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 15,640 page likes on Facebook and 107,500 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Aug. 17, 2021); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Aug. 17, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> See generally *News*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

<sup>12</sup> *Trump Administration’s Contacts with Ukraine*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-contacts-with-ukraine>.

<sup>13</sup> 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;<sup>14</sup> 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;<sup>15</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>16</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:

- 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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[response-to-coronavirus](https://www.americanoversight.org/cdc-calendars-from-2018-and-2019-pandemic-related-briefings-and-meetings); 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>14</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, <https://www.americanoversight.org/border-wall-investigation-report-no-plans-no-funding-no-timeline-no-wall>.

<sup>15</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>16</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>.

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.<sup>17</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>18</sup>
- 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>19</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.

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<sup>17</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>18</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).

<sup>19</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>.

- 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](mailto: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