



March 27, 2017

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Michael Marquis
Freedom of Information Officer
Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building, Room 729H
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201
FOIARequest@hhs.gov

Re: Expedited Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Mr. Marquis:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552 *et seq.* and your Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) implementing regulations, 45 C.F.R. Part 5, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

On January 26, 2017, Politico reported that the Trump administration had cancelled previously planned advertising and outreach for the Affordable Care Act in the last week of the annual open enrollment period.¹ The advertising that was to be pulled reportedly included some ads that had already been placed and paid for.² One day later, the administration backtracked somewhat on those plans and permitted ads to be aired if the government would lose money already paid for the ads.³ However, there is reason to think the decreased advertising expenditures ultimately affected enrollment numbers.⁴ The public deserves to know the administration's reasoning for these actions.

¹ See, e.g., Paul Demko, *Trump White House Abruptly Halts Obamacare Ads*, POLITICO (Jan. 26, 2017, 6:05 PM), <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/01/trump-white-house-obamacare-ads-234245>; Robert Pear, *Days Before a Deadline, Trump Team Cancels Ads for Obama Health Plan*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/26/us/politics/donald-trump-obamacare-ads.html?_r=0.

² Paul Demko, *Trump White House Abruptly Halts Obamacare Ads*, POLITICO (Jan. 26, 2017, 6:05 PM), <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/01/trump-white-house-obamacare-ads-234245>

³ Amy Goldstein, *Trump Administration Backtracks on ACA Enrollment Outreach*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, Jan. 27, 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/politics/ct-trump-obamacare-advertising-20170127-story.html>.

⁴ See Michael Grunwald, *Is Trump Sabotaging Obamacare?*, POLITICO MAGAZINE, Mar. 14, 2017, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/is-trump-sabotaging-obamacare-214907>.



Requested Records

American Oversight requests that HHS produce the following within twenty business days and seeks expedited review of this request for the reasons identified below:

1. Any decision memoranda relating to the initial decision to halt advertising and outreach in connection with the Affordable Care Act, any advice or analysis prepared in connection with that decision, and any other record documenting the decision or its rationale.
2. Any decision memoranda relating to any subsequent reversal of the decision to halt advertising and outreach in connection with the Affordable Care Act or authorizing certain advertising and outreach in connection with the Affordable Care Act to continue, as well as any advice or analysis prepared in connection with that decision.
3. All communications relating to the initial decision to stop advertising and outreach for the Affordable Care Act, as well as any subsequent changes to that decision.
4. Any internal directives or guidance—including emails—issued to HHS staff relating to advertising and outreach for the Affordable Care Act, and any communications with private parties in connection with such advertising or outreach, including directives to initiate or cancel advertising.

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

In addition to the records requested above, American Oversight also requests records describing the processing of this request, including records sufficient to identify search terms used and locations and custodians searched and any tracking sheets used to track the processing of this request. If your agency uses FOIA questionnaires or certifications completed by individual custodians or components to determine whether they possess responsive materials or to describe how they conducted searches, we also request any such records prepared in connection with the processing of this request.

American Oversight seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. 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 includes any attachments to these records. **No category of material should be omitted from search, collection, and production.**

Please search all records regarding agency business. **You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts. Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files is subject to the**

Federal Records Act and FOIA.⁵ **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, through negligence or willfulness, failed to meet their obligations.**⁶

In addition, please note that in conducting a “reasonable search” as required by law, you must employ the most up-to-date technologies and tools available, in addition to searches by individual custodians likely to have responsive information. Recent technology may have rendered HHS’s prior FOIA practices unreasonable. **In light of the government-wide requirements to manage information electronically by the end of 2016, it is no longer reasonable to rely exclusively on custodian-driven searches.**⁷ Furthermore, agencies that have adopted the National Archives and Records Agency (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies, now maintain emails in a form that is reasonably likely to be more complete than individual custodians’ files. For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but HHS’s archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insists that HHS 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; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.**

Under the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, agencies must adopt a presumption of disclosure, withholding information “only if . . . disclosure would harm an interest protected by an exemption” or “disclosure is prohibited by law.”⁸ If it is your position that any portion of the requested records is exempt from disclosure, American Oversight requests that you provide an index of those

⁵ 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).

⁶ See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016) (“The Government argues that because the agency had a policy requiring [the official] to forward all of his emails from his [personal] account to his business email, the [personal] account only contains duplicate agency records at best. Therefore, the Government claims that any hypothetical deletion of the [personal account] emails would still leave a copy of those records intact in [the official’s] work email. However, policies are rarely followed to perfection by anyone. At this stage of the case, the Court cannot assume that each and every work-related email in the [personal] account was duplicated in [the official’s] work email account.” (citations omitted)).

⁷ Presidential Memorandum—Managing Government Records, 76 Fed. Reg. 75,423 (Nov. 28, 2011), available at <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), available at <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf>.

⁸ FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114-185).

documents as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973), *cert. denied*, 415 U.S. 977 (1974). As you are aware, a *Vaughn* index must describe each document claimed as exempt with sufficient specificity “to permit a reasoned judgment as to whether the material is actually exempt under FOIA.”⁹ Moreover, the *Vaughn* index “must describe *each* document or portion thereof withheld, and for *each* withholding it must discuss the consequences of disclosing the sought-after information.”¹⁰ Further, “the withholding agency must supply ‘a relatively detailed justification, specifically identifying the reasons why a particular exemption is relevant and correlating those claims with the particular part of a withheld document to which they apply.’”¹¹

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.¹² Claims of nonsegregability must be made with the same degree of detail as required for claims of exemptions in a *Vaughn* index. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically that it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.

You should institute a preservation hold on information responsive to this request. American Oversight intends to pursue all legal avenues to enforce its right of access under FOIA, including litigation if necessary. Accordingly, HHS is on notice that litigation is reasonably foreseeable.

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 or duplication costs. By working together at the outset, American Oversight and HHS 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 rolling basis.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and 45 C.F.R. § 5.54, 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

⁹ *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

¹⁰ *King v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223–24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphasis in original).

¹¹ *Id.* at 224 (citing *Mead Data Central, Inc. v. U.S. Dep’t of the Air Force*, 566 F.2d 242, 251 (D.C. Cir. 1977)).

¹² *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

better understanding of relevant government procedures by the general public in a significant way.¹³ Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.¹⁴

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 government.”¹⁵ During his campaign and after taking office, President Trump repeatedly promised to “repeal and replace” the Affordable Care Act (ACA).¹⁶ Shortly after taking office, he took steps that would impact the implementation the Act, including by cutting funding for planned advertising and outreach activities during the last week of the annual open enrollment period.¹⁷ Then, on Monday, March 6, 2017, Republicans in the House of Representatives introduced their proposal to replace the ACA with a bill known as the American Health Care Act (AHCA).¹⁸ On March 24, 2017, however, House Republican leaders pulled the AHCA after failing to gain enough support to pass the bill.¹⁹ Given that the ACA will therefore remain in place for the foreseeable future, the public has both a need and a right to know how the Trump administration is managing the current health care system under applicable law.

This request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.²⁰ 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 will use the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, or

¹³ 45 C.F.R. § 5.54(a).

¹⁴ 45 C.F.R. § 5.54(a).

¹⁵ 45 C.F.R. § 5.54(b)(1)-(2).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Nolan McCaskill, *Trump Wants ‘Special Session’ To Repeal Obamacare*, POLITICO (Nov. 1, 2016, 1:05 PM), <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/trump-obamacare-special-session-230588>; MJ Lee, *Trump Gives a Boost to Obamacare Repeal, but Doesn’t Solve GOP Problems*, CNN (Mar. 1, 2017, 6:04 AM), <http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/01/politics/obamacare-donald-trump-address/>.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Paul Demko, *Trump White House Abruptly Halts Obamacare Ads*, POLITICO (Jan. 26, 2017, 6:05 PM), <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/01/trump-white-house-obamacare-ads-234245>; Michael Grunwald, *Is Trump Sabotaging Obamacare*, POLITICO MAGAZINE, Mar. 14, 2017, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/is-trump-sabotaging-obamacare-214907>

¹⁸ Amy Goldstein et al., *House Republicans Release Long-Awaited Plan to Replace Obamacare*, WASH. POST (Mar. 6, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/new-details-emerge-on-gop-plans-to-repeal-and-replace-obamacare/2017/03/06/04751e3e-028f-11e7-ad5b-d22680e18d10_story.html?utm_term=.b934c16fb899.

¹⁹ Mike DeBonis et al., *GOP Health-Care Bill: House Republican Leaders Abruptly Pull Their Rewrite of the Nation’s Health-Care Law*, WASH. POST (Mar. 24, 2017, 4:24 PM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/house-leaders-prepare-to-vote-friday-on-health-care-reform/2017/03/24/736f1cd6-1081-11e7-9d5a-a83e627dc120_story.html?hpid=hp_rhp-banner-main_housevote715a-banner%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.a8fe3ca41561.

²⁰ 45 C.F.R. § 5.54(b)(3).

other media. American Oversight will also make materials it gathers available on our public website.

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

Application for Expedited Processing

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(E)(i) and 45 C.F.R. § 5.27(b), American Oversight requests that HHS expedite the processing of this request.

I certify to be true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief, that there is an urgent need to inform the public about the federal government activity that is the subject of this request. On March 24, 2017, House Republican leaders pulled their proposal to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act.²¹ Given Mr. Trump’s well-known hostility toward the ACA, there is an urgent need for the public to understand how the Trump Administration is handling the health care system under the current law, which will now remain in place for the foreseeable future. The information sought in this request will meaningfully further public discourse on this issue of national concern.

I further certify that American Oversight is primarily engaged in disseminating information to the public. 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. Similar to other organizations that have been found to satisfy the criteria necessary to qualify for expedition,²² American Oversight “gathers information of potential interest to a segment of the public, uses its editorial skills to turn the raw material into a distinct work, and distributes that work to an audience.”²³ American Oversight will use the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, and other media. American Oversight will also make materials it gathers available on its public website.

Accordingly, American Oversight’s request satisfies the criteria for expedition.

Conclusion

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, have any questions, or foresee any problems in fully releasing the requested records,

²¹ Mike DeBonis et al., *GOP Health-Care Bill: House Republican Leaders Abruptly Pull Their Rewrite of the Nation’s Health-Care Law*, WASH. POST (Mar. 24, 2017, 4:24 PM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/house-leaders-prepare-to-vote-friday-on-health-care-reform/2017/03/24/736f1cd6-1081-11e7-9d5a-a83e627dc120_story.html?hpid=hp_rhp-banner-main_housevote715a-banner%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.a8fe3ca41561.

²² See *ACLU v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, 321 F. Supp. 2d 24, 30–31 (D.D.C. 2004); *EPIC v. Dep’t of Defense*, 241 F. Supp. 2d 5, 15 (D.D.C. 2003).

²³ *ACLU*, 321 F. Supp. 2d at 29 n.5 (quoting *EPIC*, 241 F. Supp. 2d at 11).

please contact Sara Creighton at foia@americanoversight.org or (202) 869-5246. 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 flourish extending to the left.

Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight