



September 7, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Clarice Julka
FOIA Public Liaison
Office of the Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
MS-7328, MIB
Washington, DC 20240
osfoia@ios.doi.gov

Brian A. May
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Officer
U.S. Geological Survey
U.S. Department of the Interior
5522 Research Park Drive
Baltimore, MD 21228
foia@usgs.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Ms. Julka & Mr. May:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations of the Department of the Interior (DOI), 43 C.F.R. Part 2, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

DOI recently classified uranium as a “critical mineral,” though uranium—as a fuel mineral—arguably does not meet the definition of a critical mineral under Executive Order 13817.¹ Ranking Member Raul Grijalva of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources has raised concerns about this designation.² The public is particularly concerned that DOI’s designation of uranium as a critical mineral could allow uranium mining at or around the Grand Canyon.³ In light of reports that the uranium mining industry pressed the Trump administration to

¹ Brian Maffly, *Uranium Makes Feds’ List of Minerals ‘Critical’ to National Security, Setting Off a Debate in Utah and Beyond*, SALT LAKE TRIB., May 26, 2018, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/environment/2018/05/23/uranium-makes-feds-list-of-minerals-critical-to-national-security-setting-off-a-debate-in-utah-and-beyond/>.

² Ltr. from Rep. Grijalva to Dep’t of the Interior Sec. Ryan Zinke, May 21, 2018, <http://democrats-naturalresources.house.gov/imo/media/doc/2018-05-21%20Rep.%20Grijalva%20to%20Sec.%20Zinke%20re%20Critical%20Minerals%20List.pdf>.

³ See Ryan Heinsius, *Interior Department Classifies Uranium as a ‘Critical Mineral’*, KNAU ARIZ. PUBLIC RADIO (May 23, 2018), <http://www.kнау.org/post/interior-department-classifies-uranium-critical-mineral>; Maya L. Kapoor, *A New Era of Uranium Mining Near the Grand Canyon*, HIGH COUNTRY NEWS, June 12, 2018, <https://www.hcn.org/issues/50.11/energy-and-industry-a-new-era-of-uranium-mining-near-the-grand-canyon>.



shrink the Bears Ears National Monument,⁴ American Oversight seeks records with the potential to shed light on the influence of uranium mining companies and their lobbyists on the administration's critical mineral designations and other policies.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that DOI produce the following within twenty business days:

1. All records reflecting communications (including emails, email attachments, text messages, messages on messaging platforms (such as Slack, GChat, Lync, Skype, WhatsApp, Facebook messages, and Twitter Direct Messages), telephone call logs, calendar invitations/entries, meeting notices, meeting agendas, informational material, draft legislation, talking points, any handwritten or electronic notes taken during any oral communications, summaries of any oral communications, or other materials) between political appointees* in (a) the Office of the Secretary, (b) the Office of the Deputy Secretary, (c) the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, or (d) the Office of the Director of the U.S. Geological Survey and:
 - a) Any employee or representative of the Uranium Producers of America (@theupa.org); or
 - b) Any employee or representative of Energy Fuels Resources Inc. or its affiliates (@energyfuels.com); or
 - c) Any employee or representative of Invariant LLC (@invariantgr.com); or
 - d) Any employee or representative of Comeau, Maldegen, Templeman & Indall (@cmtesantafe.com); or
 - e) Any employee or representative of Uranium One group or its affiliates (@u1h.com, u1trading.com, uranium1.com, u1holding.com); or
 - f) Any employee or representative of Cameco Corp. (@cameco.com); or
 - g) Any employee or representative of Dentons US (@dentons.com); or
 - h) Any employee or representative of Rio Tinto Group or its affiliates (@riotinto.com); or
 - i) Any employee or representative of Ernst & Young (@ey.com); or
 - j) Any employee or representative of the Smith-Free Group; or
 - k) Any employee or representative of BHP Billiton or its affiliates (@bhp.com).
2. All records reflecting communications (including emails, email attachments, text messages, messages on messaging platforms (such as Slack, GChat, Lync, Skype, WhatsApp, Facebook messages, and Twitter Direct Messages), telephone call logs, calendar invitations/entries, meeting notices, meeting agendas, informational material, draft legislation, talking points, any handwritten or electronic notes taken during any oral communications, summaries of any oral communications, or other materials)

⁴ Hiroko Tabuchi, *Uranium Miners Pushed Hard for a Comeback. They Got Their Wish.*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 13, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/13/climate/trump-uranium-bears-ears.html>.

between personnel at the U.S. Geological Survey's National Minerals Information Center who were involved in drafting DOI's list of critical minerals and:

- a) Any employee or representative of the Uranium Producers of America (@theupa.org); or
 - b) Any employee or representative of Energy Fuels Resources Inc. or its affiliates (@energyfuels.com); or
 - c) Any employee or representative of Invariant LLC (@invariantgr.com); or
 - d) Any employee or representative of Comeau, Maldegen, Templeman & Indall (@cmtesantafe.com); or
 - e) Any employee or representative of Uranium One group or its affiliates (@u1h.com, @u1trading.com, @uranium1.com, @u1holding.com); or
 - f) Any employee or representative of Cameco Corp. (@cameco.com); or
 - g) Any employee or representative of Dentons US (@dentons.com); or
 - h) Any employee or representative of Rio Tinto Group or its affiliates (@riotinto.com); or
 - i) Any employee or representative of Ernst & Young (@ey.com); or
 - j) Any employee or representative of the Smith-Free Group; or
- Any employee or representative of BHP Billiton or its affiliates (@bhp.com).

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

*“Political appointee” should be understood as any person who is a Presidential Appointee with Senate Confirmation (PAS), a Presidential Appointee (PA), a non-career SES, any Schedule C employees, or any persons hired under Temporary Non-Career SES Appointments, Limited Term SES Appointments, or Temporary Transitional Schedule C Appointments.

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 DOI 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 DOI’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 Administration (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 DOI’s archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insists that DOI 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”

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), <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>.

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 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, DOI 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 DOI 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.

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

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) (emphases 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.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and 43 C.F.R. § 2.45(a), 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.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 operations or activities.”¹⁵ The requested records are records reflecting communications that have the potential to shed light on whether private interests in the uranium mining industry or lobbyists for that industry affected federal government policies related uranium mining.¹⁶ As noted above, this issue has raised concerns the ranking member of House Committee on Natural Resources.¹⁷ And the public is concerned with the possibility of uranium mining near or at the Grand Canyon and in lands formerly designated as within the Bears Ears National Monument.¹⁸ The American people deserve to know if federal policy regarding uranium is being unduly influenced by private interests that stand to gain a profit from uranium mining. As discussed below American Oversight has both the ability and the intention to effectively convey the information it receives to the public, and disclosure of the requested records to American Oversight will “contribute significantly to public understanding of government operations or activities.”¹⁹

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 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.²¹ American

¹³ 43 C.F.R. § 2.45(a)(1).

¹⁴ 43 C.F.R. § 2.45(a)(2).

¹⁵ 43 C.F.R. § 2.45(a)(1); *see also* 43 C.F.R. § 2.48(a)(1)–(4).

¹⁶ *See* Maffly, *supra* note 1, Heinsius, *supra* note 3; Tabuchi, *supra* note 4.

¹⁷ *See* Ltr. from Rep. Grijalva *supra* note 2.

¹⁸ *See* Maffly, *supra* note 1, Heinsius, *supra* note 3; Tabuchi, *supra* note 4.

¹⁹ 43 C.F.R. § 2.48(a)(1).

²⁰ 43 C.F.R. § 2.45(a)(2); 43 C.F.R. § 2.48(b)(1)–(3).

²¹ American Oversight currently has approximately 11,900 page likes on Facebook and 45,100 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Sept. 6, 2018); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Sept. 6, 2018).

Oversight has demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content. For example, after receiving records regarding an ethics waiver received by a senior DOJ attorney, American Oversight promptly posted the records to its website²² and published an analysis of what the records reflected about DOJ's process for ethics waivers.²³ Additionally, American Oversight has a project called "Audit the Wall," where the organization is gathering and analyzing information and commenting on public releases of information related to the administration's proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border.²⁴

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

Conclusion

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with DOI 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, please contact Dan McGrath at foia@americanoversight.org or 202.897.4213. 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

²² *DOJ Civil Division Response Noel Francisco Compliance*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>.

²³ *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>.

²⁴ *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>.