



April 22, 2019

**VIA EMAIL**

FOIA Requester Service Center  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue SW  
Mail Stop MA-46  
Washington, DC 20585  
[foia-central@hq.doe.gov](mailto:foia-central@hq.doe.gov)

Toyia Johnson, FOIA Public Liaison  
Office of External Affairs  
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission  
888 First Street NE  
Washington, DC 20426  
[foia-ceii@ferc.gov](mailto:foia-ceii@ferc.gov)

**Re: Freedom of Information Act Request**

Dear Freedom of Information Officers:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations for the Department of Energy (DOE), 10 C.F.R. Part 1004, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

In late 2018, the Trump administration installed a new set of energy advisers who will likely be driving the White House's messaging on climate change and energy policy in the coming year.<sup>1</sup> These advisers have a track record of fossil fuel promotion and climate change denial, including appearances at conferences of anti-climate science organizations.<sup>2</sup>

American Oversight seeks records to shed light on how the administration's climate and energy policy is being shaped by climate skeptics and industry proponents at the expense of public health and national security.

**Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that DOE and FERC produce the following within twenty business days:

All email communications (including emails, email attachments, calendar entries, or any other records reflecting communications) with the following individuals:

- i. Wells Griffith, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for International Energy and Environment at the National Security Council/National Economic Council;

---

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Northey & Scott Waldman, *Meet 4 Insiders Grappling with Climate, Energy Issues*, E&E NEWS, Dec. 26, 2018, <https://www.eenews.net/special-reports/People-to-Watch-2019/stories/1060110491>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*



- ii. Francis Brooke, Senior Energy Advisor to the President in the White House Office; and/or
- iii. Brooke Rollins, Assistant to the President in the White House Office of American Innovation.

American Oversight requests that the search include at a minimum the records of the following individuals:

DOE

- i. Secretary Rick Perry;
- ii. Deputy Secretary Dan Brouillette;
- iii. Under Secretary Mark Menezes;
- iv. Any person serving in the position of Chief of Staff;
- v. Any person serving in the position of White House Liaison or Advisor;
- vi. Any person serving in the position of Assistant Secretary for the Office of International Affairs and the Chief of Staff for the Office of International Affairs;
- vii. Any person serving in the position of Assistant Secretary for Fossil Energy; and
- viii. Any person serving in the position of Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

FERC

- i. Chairman Neil Chatterjee;
- ii. All current and former Commissioners;
- iii. Any person serving in the position of Chief of Staff to the Chairman or Commissioners;
- iv. Any person serving in the position of Director of the Office of Energy Projects;
- v. Any person serving in the position of Director of the Office of Energy Market Regulation; and
- vi. Any person serving in the position of Director of the Office of Energy Policy and Innovation.

Please provide all responsive records from April 1, 2018, through the date the search is conducted for communications with Wells Griffith and Francis Brooke. Please provide all responsive records from February 1, 2018, through the date the search is conducted for communications with Brooke Rollins.

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, 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 are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.<sup>3</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, through negligence or willfulness, failed to meet their obligations.**<sup>4</sup>

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 your agency’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.**<sup>5</sup> 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 your agency’s archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insists

---

<sup>3</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>4</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) (“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)).

<sup>5</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>.

that your agency 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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.”<sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup> 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.’”<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> 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, you are 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 your agency undertakes a search or incurs search or duplication costs. By working together at the outset, we can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

---

<sup>6</sup> FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114-185).

<sup>7</sup> *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

<sup>8</sup> *King v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223–24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphases in original).

<sup>9</sup> *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)).

<sup>10</sup> *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

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 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and DOE regulations,<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.<sup>13</sup>

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 the operations or activities of the government.”<sup>14</sup> The government has a duty to care for the general welfare of its citizens, and its action on climate change is a critical government activity, as confirmed by the federal government’s own scientific assessments as well as the most recent report issued by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.<sup>15</sup> There are few—if any—matters of greater public concern than anthropogenic climate change, as reflected both by the scientific consensus<sup>16</sup> and media reporting<sup>17</sup> as to the necessity of urgent action. The public deserves

---

<sup>11</sup> See 10 C.F.R. § 1004.9(a)(8); 10 C.F.R. § 1703.106.

<sup>12</sup> 10 C.F.R. § 1004.9(a)(8)(i)(A)-(D).

<sup>13</sup> 10 C.F.R. § 1004.9(a)(8)(ii)(A)-(B).

<sup>14</sup> 10 C.F.R. § 1004.9(a)(8)(i)(A)-(D).

<sup>15</sup> United Nations, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Report, *Global Warming of 1.5° C*, Oct. 8, 2018, available at <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/> (last visited Mar. 5, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., *Scientific Consensus: Earth’s Climate is Warming*, NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION, <https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>; J. Cook et al., *Consensus on Consensus: A Synthesis of Consensus Estimates on Human-Caused Global Warming*, Environmental Research Letters, Vol. 11 No. 4 (Apr. 13, 2016), available at <http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/11/4/048002>; *Human-Induced Climate Change Requires Urgent Action*, AMERICAN GEOPHYSICAL UNION (adopted 2003; revised and reaffirmed Aug. 2013), available at [https://sciencepolicy.agu.org/files/2013/07/AGU-Climate-Change-Position-Statement\\_August-2013.pdf](https://sciencepolicy.agu.org/files/2013/07/AGU-Climate-Change-Position-Statement_August-2013.pdf); *Climate Change*, THE GEOLOGICAL SOC’Y OF AM. (adopted Oct. 2006, revised Apr. 2015), available at <https://www.geosociety.org/gsa/positions/position10.aspx>.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Sophie Aziakou, *Climate Change: Urgent Action Needed to Avert a Crisis for Children*, FORBES (Oct. 10, 2018, 4:07 PM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/unicefusa/2018/10/10/climate-change-urgent-action-needed-to-avert-a-crisis-for-children>; Stephen Leahy, *Climate Change Impacts Worse Than Expected, Global Report Warns*, NAT’L GEOGRAPHIC, Oct. 7, 2018,

to know whether and to what extent the federal government's response to an imminent crisis is being undermined for political purposes. And, as described in more detail below, American Oversight will disseminate the information to a reasonably broad audience of persons through its social media accounts and its website.

This request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.<sup>18</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>19</sup> American 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,<sup>20</sup> American Oversight promptly posted the records to its website and published an analysis of what the records reflected about DOJ's process for ethics waivers.<sup>21</sup> As another example, 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.<sup>22</sup>

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 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, please contact Hart Wood at [foia@americanoversight.org](mailto:foia@americanoversight.org) or 202.873.1743. Also, if American

---

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/10/ipcc-report-climate-change-impacts-forests-emissions/>.

<sup>18</sup> 10 C.F.R. § 1004.9(a)(8)(ii)(A)-(B).

<sup>19</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 12,200 page likes on Facebook and 54,100 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Apr. 19, 2019); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Apr. 19, 2019).

<sup>20</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>.

<sup>21</sup> *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>22</sup> *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>.

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, reading "Austin R. Evers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Austin R. Evers  
Executive Director  
American Oversight