



November 18, 2020

VIA EMAIL

Texas Military, Office of the Adjutant General
Attn: General Counsel, NGTX-GCF (PIA Coordinator)
P.O. Box 5218, Austin, TX 78763-5218
ng.tx.txarng.mbx.freedom-of-information-act@mail.mil

Re: Public Information Request

Dear Public Information Coordinator:

Pursuant to the Texas Public Information Act, as codified at Tex. Code ch. 552, American Oversight makes the following request for public records.

After reports that the Texas National Guard would be deployed to major cities in Texas the weekend before the 2020 general election,¹ Major General Tracy Norris, Adjutant General of the Texas Military Department, confirmed that there was “no request nor plan to provide any type of support at any polling location in Texas.”²

American Oversight seeks records with that may shed light on the potential deployment of the Texas National Guard ahead of the election.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that the Texas Military Department promptly produce the following:

- 1) All orders, directives, or guidance created by or provided to the Texas Military Department regarding the deployment of troops to major Texas cities from October 23, 2020, through November 6, 2020.
- 2) All email communications (including email messages, complete email chains, email attachments, and calendar invitations) sent by the officials specified

¹ Sig Christenson, *Texas Guard to Send Troops to Cities for Possible ‘Postelection’ Disturbances*, San Antonio Express-News (Oct. 26, 2020, 10:58 PM), <https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/politics/article/Texas-Guard-Abbott-to-order-1-000-troops-to-15676005.php>.

² MG Tracy Norris (@MGTracyNorris), Twitter (Oct. 26, 2020, 5:35 PM), <https://twitter.com/MGTracyNorris/status/1320841584863305729> (“The Texas National Guard continues to support DPS guarding historical landmarks such as the Alamo and the State Capitol. To be clear, there has been no request nor plan to provide any type of support at any polling location in Texas.”).



below, or anyone serving in the capacity of their chief of staff, and containing any of the following key terms:

Specified Officials

1. Major General Tracy Norris, Adjutant General, Texas
2. Chief Master Sergeant, Michael Cornitius, Command Senior Enlisted Leader
3. Brigadier General Thomas Suelzer, Director, Joint Staff
4. Shelia Taylor, Director of State Administration

Key Terms

1. Elect*
2. Poll*
3. Unrest
4. Protest*
5. "Alamo and the State Capitol"

In an effort to accommodate the Texas Military Department and reduce the number of potentially responsive records to be processed and produced, American Oversight has limited item 2 of its request to emails sent by the specified officials. To be clear, however, American Oversight still requests that complete email chains be produced, displaying both sent and received messages. This means, for example, that both a specified official's response to an email from containing a key term and the initial received message are responsive to this request and should be produced.

Please note that American Oversight is using the asterisk (*) to designate the standard use of "wildcards" in the search for responsive records. For example, a search for "elect*" would return all of the following: elect, elects, election, elections, etc. If your agency is unable to search for wildcards, please advise so that we may specifically include the variations that we would like searched.

Please provide all responsive records from October 1, 2020, through the date the search is conducted.

American Oversight seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. In conducting your search, please understand the term "record" in its 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.**

In addition, American Oversight insists that your office 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; governmental authorities may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.**

Please search all records regarding official business. **You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts.** Emails conducting government business sent or received on the personal account of a governmental authority's officer or employee constitutes a record for purposes of the Texas Public Information Act.³

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. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically that 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 your office 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.

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 your office 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.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with Tex. Code § 552.267(a), American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records because such a waiver “is in the public interest because providing the copy of the information primarily benefits the

³ Tex. Code § 552.002(a-2); *see also Adkisson v. Paxton*, 459 S.W.3d 761, 773 (Tex. App. 2015).

general public.” The requested records are directly related to the work of state officials, with the potential to shed light on the Texas Military Department’s involvement with the deployment of Texas National Guard troops related to the November election. This matter is a subject of substantial public interest in Texas,⁴ and release of records that may help the public understand related operations and activities of state officials is in the public interest.

Release of the requested records will primarily benefit the public.⁵ As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the requested records is not in American Oversight’s financial interest, but is rather in the public interest. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses governmental authorities provide to public records requests publicly available. As noted, the subject of this request is a matter of public interest, and the public would benefit from an enhanced understanding of the government’s activities through American Oversight’s analysis and publication of these records. 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.⁶

American Oversight has also demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content through numerous substantive analyses posted to its website.⁷ Examples reflecting this commitment to the public disclosure of documents and the creation of editorial content include the posting of records related to the organization’s State Accountability Project covering voting rights issues in various states;⁸ the posting of records related to the Trump Administration’s contacts with Ukraine and analyses of those contacts;⁹ posting records and editorial content

⁴ See, e.g., Shawn Mulcahy, *A Week Before the Election, Texas National Guard Prepares to Deploy Troops to Cities*, Texas Trib. (Oct. 27, 2020, 12:00 PM), <https://www.texastribune.org/2020/10/27/texas-national-guard-troops-election-deploy/>.

⁵ Tex. Code § 552.267(a).

⁶ American Oversight currently has approximately 15,600 page likes on Facebook and 106,100 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Nov. 5, 2020); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Nov. 5, 2020).

⁷ News, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

⁸ *State Accountability Project*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/areas_of_investigation/state-local-investigations.

⁹ *Trump Administration’s Contacts with Ukraine*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-contacts-with-ukraine>.

about the federal government's response to the Coronavirus pandemic;¹⁰ posting records received as part of American Oversight's "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;¹¹ 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;¹² and posting records and analysis of federal officials' use of taxpayer dollars to charter private aircraft or use government planes for unofficial business.¹³

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver. If your office denies our request for a fee waiver, please notify American Oversight of any anticipated fees or costs in excess of \$40 prior to incurring such costs or fees.

Conclusion

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with your county 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 Emma Lewis at records@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.

¹⁰ See generally *The Trump Administration's Response to Coronavirus*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-response-to-coronavirus>; 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>.

¹¹ 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>.

¹² *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>.

¹³ 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>.

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