



January 13, 2021

VIA ONLINE PORTAL

Arla Witte-Simpson
FOIA Public Liaison
Executive Office for United States Attorneys
175 N St. NE, Suite 5,400
Washington, DC 20530-0001
Via FOIA Online

Douglas Hibbard
Chief, Initial Request Staff
Office of Information Policy
Department of Justice
441 G St. NW, 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20530
Via Online Portal

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear FOIA Officers,

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations of the Department of Justice (DOJ), 28 C.F.R. Part 16, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

On January 4, 2021, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia, Byung J. “BJay” Pak announced his immediate resignation,¹ despite previously indicating he would remain in his position until January 20.² In naming a new acting leader for the office, President Trump bypassed U.S. Attorney Pak’s first assistant in favor of Bobby Christine, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia, who will hold both roles simultaneously.³ U.S. Attorney Pak’s resignation and U.S. Attorney Christine’s appointment came just days after news broke that President Trump pressured Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to “find 11,780 votes” to help overturn the results

¹ Press Release, *U.S. Attorney Pak Submits Resignation*, U.S. Att’y’s Office for the N. Dist. of Ga., Jan. 4, 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga/pr/us-attorney-pak-submits-resignation>.

² Tierney Sneed, *Exclusive: Atlanta-Based U.S. Attorney Abruptly Departs Office Sooner Than Expected*, Talking Points Memo (Jan. 4, 2021, 12:59 PM), <https://talkingpointsmemo.com/news/us-attorney-georgia-depart>.

³ Tierney Sneed, *Exclusive: Trump Bypasses Top Career Prosecutor to Name New Acting US Attorney in Atlanta*, Talking Points Memo (Jan. 5, 2021, 8:40 AM), <https://talkingpointsmemo.com/news/trump-appointed-bobby-christine>.



of the 2020 presidential election.⁴ *The Wall Street Journal* subsequently reported that a senior DOJ official called U.S. Attorney Pak, at the White House's direction, on the night of January 3, reporting to Mr. Pak that President Trump was "furious that there was no investigation related to election fraud and that the president wanted to fire Mr. Pak."⁵

American Oversight seeks records with the potential to shed light on the circumstances surrounding U.S. Attorney Pak's resignation and U.S. Attorney Christine's appointment.

Requested Records

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

1. All records reflecting the content of the January 3, 2021 call between a senior DOJ official and U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia Byung J. Pak regarding the 2020 presidential election, and/or desired or active investigations of purported election fraud.⁶ Notes, summaries, talking points, and subsequent email and text messages conveying the content of this call are, among other records, responsive to this request.
2. All records reflecting the content of the January 3, 2021 call between President Trump and U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia Bobby Christine regarding Mr. Christine's appointment to serve as Acting U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia and/or the 2020 presidential election or desired or active investigations of purported election fraud.⁷ Notes, summaries, talking points, and subsequent email and text messages conveying the content of this call are, among other records, responsive to this request.
3. All records reflecting communications (including emails, email attachments, text messages, messages on messaging platforms (such as Slack, GChat or Google Hangouts, Lync, Skype, or WhatsApp), telephone call logs, calendar invitations, calendar 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 (1) the senior DOJ official who

⁴ Amy Gardner & Paulina Firozi, *Here's the Full Transcript and Audio of the Call Between Trump and Raffensperger*, Wash. Post (Jan. 3, 2021, 4:15 PM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-raffensperger-call-transcript-georgia-vote/2021/01/03/2768e0cc-4ddd-11eb-83e3-322644d82356_story.html.

⁵ Aruna Viswanatha et al., *White House Forced Georgia U.S. Attorney to Resign*, Wall St. J. (Jan. 9, 2021, 9:07), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/white-house-forced-georgia-u-s-attorney-to-resign-11610225840>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

called U.S. Attorney Pak on January 3, 2021,⁸ and (2) President Trump or anyone who works at the White House.

Please provide all responsive records from January 3, 2021, through January 6, 2021.

This request seeks records in the possession of DOJ components whose FOIA requests are processed by both the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys and the Office of Information Policy (OIP). OIP is best situated to identify the senior DOJ official who called U.S. Attorney Pak on the night of January 3, 2021.

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.

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."⁹ The public has a significant interest in the resignation and appointments of U.S. Attorneys in Georgia ahead of the certification of the 2020 presidential election. Records with the potential to shed light on these issues would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the federal government, including whether and to what extent the president's political interests influenced U.S. Attorney Pak's resignation and U.S. Attorney Christine's appointment as the acting U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia. 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.¹⁰ 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

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

¹⁰ *See id.*

also makes materials it gathers available on its public website and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.¹¹

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.¹² 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;¹³ posting records and editorial content about the federal government's response to the Coronavirus pandemic;¹⁴ 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;¹⁵ 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;¹⁶ and posting records and analysis of federal officials' use of taxpayer dollars to charter private aircraft or use government planes for unofficial business.¹⁷

¹¹ American Oversight currently has approximately 15,600 page likes on Facebook and 105,900 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Jan. 6, 2021); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Jan. 6, 2021).

¹² See generally *News*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

¹³ *Trump Administration's Contacts with Ukraine*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-contacts-with-ukraine>.

¹⁴ 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>.

¹⁵ 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>.

¹⁶ *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>.

¹⁷ 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>.

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.
- 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹
- 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,²⁰ and many

¹⁸ 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).

¹⁹ See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016).

²⁰ 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

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.

- 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 Dan McGrath at foia@americanoversight.org or (202) 897-4213. Also, if American Oversight's request

Directive," M-12-18 (Aug. 24, 2012), <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf>.

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