



July 15, 2021

**VIA EMAIL**

Representative Janel Brandtjen  
Wisconsin State Capitol  
Room 12 West  
Madison, WI 53708  
[rep.brandtjen@legis.wi.gov](mailto:rep.brandtjen@legis.wi.gov)

**Re: Public Records Law Request**

Dear Representative Brandtjen:

Pursuant to Wisconsin's public records law, Wis. Stat. §§ 19.31–19.39, American Oversight makes the following request for copies of records.

On May 26, 2021, Wisconsin State Assembly Speaker Robin Vos indicated that the legislature would hire three former law enforcement officers and a supervising attorney to investigate the November 2020 election.<sup>1</sup> Since the time of this announcement, the names of several of the contracted individuals have been made public, including former Milwaukee Police Detective Mike Sandvick and former Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Michael Gableman, whose past actions have raised concerns over the partiality of the investigation.<sup>2</sup> In June, several Wisconsin state legislators, including Assembly Campaigns and Elections Committee chair Janel Brandtjen, visited the site of the Arizona State Senate's partisan "audit."<sup>3</sup> Former President Trump, among others, has

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Marley, *Top Wisconsin Republican Robin Vos Hires Former Cops to Investigate November Election*, Milwaukee J. Sentinel (updated May 26, 2021, 5:16 PM), <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2021/05/26/wisconsin-republican-robin-vos-hires-ex-cops-investigate-election/7455034002/>.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Marley & Molly Beck, *The Election Investigator Hired by Vos Wrote a Police Report that Spawned Partisan Fight over Voting Rules in 2008*, Milwaukee J. Sentinel (updated May 28, 2021, 3:07 PM), <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2021/05/28/wisconsin-election-investigator-vos-hired-has-partisan-past/7477548002/>; Molly Beck, *A Former Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Will Oversee the Latest Election Review Sought by the State's GOP Leaders*, Milwaukee J. Sentinel (updated June 26, 2021, 2:45 PM), <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2021/06/26/former-wisconsin-supreme-court-justice-michael-gableman-will-oversee-robin-vos-2020-election-review/5357319001/>

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Marley, *Wisconsin Republicans, and a Disgraced Ex-Missouri Governor, Tour Site of Controversial Arizona Ballot Audit*, Milwaukee J. Sentinel (updated June 13, 2021, 9:35



criticized the Wisconsin Legislature for failing to pursue a “full forensic investigation” of the election.<sup>4</sup>

American Oversight seeks records with the potential to shed light on the legislature’s investigation of the November 2020 election, including records regarding similar partisan reviews in other states and calls for Wisconsin to expand its investigation.

### **Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that your office produce the following records “as soon as practicable and without delay”:<sup>5</sup>

All electronic communications (including emails, email attachments, text messages, messages on messaging platforms, such as Slack, GChat or Google Hangouts, Lync, Skype, or WhatsApp) sent or received by Representative Janel Brandtjen or anyone communicating on their behalf, such as a scheduler or assistant, or by their chief of staff, regarding the legislature’s investigation of the 2020 election.

This request should be interpreted to include, but not be limited to: direct communications with the three retired law enforcement officers (including, but not limited to, Mike Sandvick and Steve Page) and former justice Michael Gableman;<sup>6</sup> communications regarding the Assembly’s resolution authorizing the investigation;<sup>7</sup> communications regarding the scope and conduct of the investigation, including the use of subpoena power and referrals to prosecutors; communications regarding the selection and evaluation of contractors; or communications regarding the underlying premise of the investigation. In the case of emails and texts, the search should include those sent or received from the specified officials’ individual accounts if they were used to conduct official business, as well those sent from their official email addresses or official phones.

Please note that American Oversight does not seek, and that this request specifically excludes, the initial mailing of news clips or other mass-distribution emails. However, subsequent communications forwarding such emails are responsive to this

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AM), <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2021/06/12/wisconsin-republicans-review-arizona-ballots-alongside-missouri-governor-who-stepped-down-amid-scand/7671283002/>.

<sup>4</sup> Molly Beck, *Wisconsin GOP Leaders Say Trump Is ‘Misinformed’ After the Former President Claimed They Are Hiding Election Corruption*, Milwaukee J. Sentinel (updated June 26, 2021, 7:29 PM),

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2021/06/26/vos-says-trump-misinformed-after-former-president-claimed-wisconsin-gop-leaders-hiding-election-corr/5356805001/>.

<sup>5</sup> Wis. Stat. § 19.35(4)(a).

<sup>6</sup> See Beck, *supra* note 2.

<sup>7</sup> Scott Bauer, *Wisconsin Assembly OKs Election Investigation*, Associated Press, Mar. 23, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-donald-trump-wisconsin-elections-subpoenas-bb7a79e35b86a34d02e8a4b1330e21c2>.

request. In other words, for example, if Rep. Brandtjen received a mass-distribution news clip email referencing the relevant statement by the president, that initial email would not be responsive to this request. However, if Rep. Brandtjen forwarded that email to another individual with his own commentary, that subsequent message would be responsive to this request and should be produced.

Please provide all responsive records from May 28, 2021, through the date the search is conducted.<sup>8</sup>

### **Fee Waiver Request**

In accordance with Wis. Stat. § 19.35(3)(e), American Oversight respectfully requests that the records be produced without charge. Providing American Oversight with a waiver of fees is in the “public interest” because American Oversight will, in accordance with its organizational mission, make the records available to the public without charge. These disclosures will likely contribute to a better understanding of relevant government action by the general public.

American Oversight’s work is aimed solely at serving the public interest. 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. Rather, American Oversight’s mission is to serve the public by promoting transparency in government, educating the public about government activities, and ensuring 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.<sup>9</sup> American Oversight also makes materials it gathers available on its public website<sup>10</sup> and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>11</sup>

The public has a significant interest in the Wisconsin state legislature’s investigation of the November 2020 election results, including any expansion of the current

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<sup>8</sup> This request seeks records in addition to, and not duplicative of, the records sought by the request submitted on May 28, 2021, identified with American Oversight’s internal tracking number WI-REP-21-0747.

<sup>9</sup> See generally *News*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>; *State Investigations*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/states>; see, e.g., *State Government Contacts with Voting-Restriction Activists*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/state-government-contacts-with-voting-restriction-activists>; *Wisconsin Documents Offer Window into Early Uncertainty over COVID-19*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/wisconsin-documents-offer-window-into-early-uncertainty-over-covid-19>.

<sup>10</sup> *Documents*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/documents>.

<sup>11</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 15,640 page likes on Facebook and 106,200 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited July 6, 2021); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited July 6, 2021).

investigation.<sup>12</sup> Records with the potential to shed light on this matter would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the government, including whether or to what extent partisan motivations or external actors guided the decision to open an investigation or expand the scope of the current investigation. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses agencies provide to public records 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.

American Oversight asks that if its request for a fee waiver is denied in whole or in part, that you contact us prior to incurring any costs.

### **Guidance Regarding the Search & Processing of Requested Records**

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.**

Please search all locations and systems likely to have responsive 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 the authority's officer or employee constitutes a record for purposes of Wisconsin's public records laws.<sup>13</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.<sup>14</sup> 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 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

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<sup>12</sup> See *supra*, notes 1-4.

<sup>13</sup> Wisc. Dep't of J., *Wisconsin Public Records Law Compliance Guide*, Oct. 2019, at 3, <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/sites/default/files/office-open-government/Resources/PRL-GUIDE.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Wis. Stat. § 19.36(6).

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 Sarah Colombo at [records@americanoversight.org](mailto:records@americanoversight.org) or (202) 869-5244. 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,

/s/ Sarah Colombo  
Sarah Colombo  
on behalf of  
American Oversight