United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of the General Counsel
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250-1400

May 14, 2021

Delivered via Electronic Mail
Melanie Sloan
American Oversight
1030 15th Street NW, Suite B255
Washington, District of Columbia 20005
Email: foia@americanoversight.org

Re: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request No. 2020-OSEC-02620-F
Interim Response

Dear Ms. Sloan:

This is an interim response to the above-referenced FOIA request received by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of Information Affairs (OIA), FOIA Division. The request sought:

1. All email communications (email messages, email attachments, complete email chains, calendar invitations, and attachments thereto) sent by (1) anyone serving in the capacity of White House Liaison or White House Advisor (including anyone serving as their Chiefs of Staff or Deputies) to (2) anyone with an email address ending in .com / .net / .org / .edu / .mail / .us.

   American Oversight has limited its request to sent messages of the specified agency officials to reduce the volume of potentially responsive records. American Oversight still requests complete email chains. So, for example, if the White House Liaison sent a response to an incoming message from an email address specified above, the email chain containing the initially received message and the response is responsive to this request.

   Please provide all responsive records from January 1, 2019, through the date the search is conducted.

2. 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, talking points, any handwritten or electronic notes taken during any oral communications, summaries of any oral communications, or other materials) of (1) anyone serving in the capacity of White House Liaison or White House Advisor (including anyone serving as their Chiefs of Staff or Deputies) with or about (2) any of the below specified external entities or individuals:

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i. Virginia "Ginni" Thomas or any person communicating on her behalf, such as Crystal Clayton
ii. Barbara Ledeen or any person communicating on her behalf
iii. Becky Norton Dunlop or any person communicating on her behalf

Please provide all responsive records from January 1, 2019, through the date the search is conducted.

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, talking points, any handwritten or electronic notes taken during any oral communications, summaries of any oral communications, or other materials) between (1) any political appointees* in the immediate front Office of the Secretary (or the senior-most official at your agency) as well as anyone serving in the capacity of White House Liaison or White House Advisor (including anyone serving as their Chiefs of Staff or Deputies) and (2) John McEntee, head of the Presidential Personnel Office at the White House, or anyone communicating on his behalf.

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

   *"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.

4. All records reflecting the content of a meeting between (1) anyone serving in the capacity of White House Liaison or White House Advisor (including anyone serving as their Chiefs of Staff or Deputies) and (2) John McEntee, head of the Presidential Personnel Office at the White House, on or about February 20, 2020,3 including any calendar entries, emails and other written communications about the meeting, agendas, lists of meeting attendees, minutes, summaries, handwritten notes, talking points, transcripts, or materials displayed or exchanged during the meeting.

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

Your request is being processed under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

Searches for records responsive to Items 2 and 4 of your request were conducted by the Client Experience Center's (CEC) eComply team. The CEC provides comprehensive, fee-for-service

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information technology (IT) associated operations, security, and technical support services to USDA end users. The CEC also implements and manages enterprise IT solutions for users Department-wide. The CEC searched the outlook accounts, calendars, and skype records of any White House Liaison or White House Advisors since January 1, 2019 for Item 2 and February 1, 2020 for Item 4. The CEC searches did not locate any records responsive to these items in your request. These searches conclude the electronic portions of Items 2 and 4 of your request. The manual search is ongoing.

The OIA continues to process Items 1 and 3 of your request and will issue a final response.

You have the right to appeal the OIA's determinations. Due to the need to issue more than one determination in order to fully resolve your request, your appeal rights for all determinations in response to this request will be provided to you in our final response letter.

You may seek dispute resolution services from the OIA's FOIA Public Liaison, Mr. Harald Fuller-Bennett. Mr. Fuller-Bennett may be contacted by telephone at 202-239-4522, or electronically at Harald.FullerBennett@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

You also have the option to seek assistance from the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS). Please visit https://www.archives.gov/ogis/mediation-program/request-assistance for information about how to request OGIS assistance in relation to a FOIA request.

If you have any questions regarding the processing of this request, please contact Ms. Melanie Enciso at (202) 694-5982, or electronically at Melanie.Enciso@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

For additional information regarding USDA FOIA regulations and processes, please refer to the information available online at www.dm.usda.gov/foia.

The OIA appreciates your patience as we continue processing the remainder of your FOIA request.

Sincerely,

Alexis R. Graves

Alexis R. Graves
Director
Office of Information Affairs

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