

Freedom Through Justice Foundation

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September 23, 2011

VIA E-MAIL & FIRST-CLASS MAIL

Lauren Wright
Public Liaison and Chief FOIA Officer
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Room 9026
Washington, DC 20503
OMBFOIA@omb.eop.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Ms. Wright:

We write on behalf of the Freedom Through Justice Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan public interest firm that uses public policy and legal reform strategies to ensure greater transparency in government, protect taxpayer interests, and promote social and economic freedoms.

Recent news reports have suggested that federal funds and property may have been used for political purposes. Accordingly, we write to request certain documents, pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"),¹ which may shed light on this controversy.

The *New York Times* reported that the Democratic National Committee ("DNC") used the White House Blue Room to hold a campaign fundraiser² and that, while President Obama attended the fundraiser,³ the meeting did not appear on his public schedule.⁴ According to a *Politico* report, all thirty guests were donors to President Obama's 2008 campaign.⁵ Further, according to a *New York Times* article, the DNC organized and sponsored the event.⁶ The

¹ 5 U.S.C. § 552, *see also* 5 C.F.R. § 2502 (applying provisions of FOIA to the Office of Administration).

² Nicholas Confessore, *Obama Seeks to Win Back Wall St. Cash*, N.Y. TIMES, June 12, 2011, *available at* http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/13/us/politics/13donor.html?_r=2 ("The event, organized by the Democratic National Committee, kicked off an aggressive push by Mr. Obama to win back the allegiance of one of his most vital sources of campaign cash").

³ *Id.*

⁴ Josh Gerstein, *Carney defends Obama meeting Wall Street donors at White House*, POLITICO, June 14, 2011, *available at* http://www.politico.com/blogs/joshgerstein/0611/Carney_defends_Obama_meeting_financeworld_donors_at_White_House.html?showal.

⁵ Josh Gerstein, *All at DNC Blue Room meeting with Obama were donors*, POLITICO, June 26, 2011, *available at* http://www.politico.com/blogs/joshgerstein/0611/All_at_DNC_Blue_Room_meeting_with_Obama_were_donors.html

⁶ Nicolas Confessore, *Obama Seeks to Win Back Wall St. Crash*, N.Y. Times, June 12, 2011 *available at* <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/13/us/politics/13donor.html>.

reports of the DNC meeting at the White House spurred congressional investigations, led by the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform at the U.S. House of Representatives.⁷ Committee Chairman Darrell Issa noted that the meeting's non-appearance on the President's calendar "call[ed] into question its official nature."⁸ According to one anonymous attendee, "It was policy-focused, but everyone knew why they were there."⁹

More recently, numerous communications between the White House and the DNC have allegedly occurred. For instance, on the weekend of September 9, 2011, both the DNC and the Obama for America campaign's major donors came together to be briefed by White House officials.¹⁰ When the President announced the American Jobs Act, the DNC had already purchased the domain name www.americanjobsact.com—a day before the name of the proposal was made public.¹¹ The DNC has also developed a major advertising campaign to support the American Jobs Act¹² and intends to run those ads in major swing states.¹³ The Freedom Through Justice Foundation is concerned that taxpayer funds, as well as the White House itself, may have been used for prohibited political purposes. Thus, we seek information concerning these events.

Pursuant to the provisions of FOIA and 5 CFR § 2502, the Freedom Through Justice Foundation hereby requests that Office of Management and Budget to produce the following within twenty (20) business days for the date range of January 1, 2010 to the present:

1. All documents, including e-mail communications, referring or relating to the March 7, 2011, Blue Room event, including, but not limited to, draft and finalized invitation lists, RSVP notices, and communications with non-federal parties including the DNC.
2. All notes, transcripts, or other documents or communications which were generated either during or as a result of the March 7, 2011 Blue Room event.
3. All documents, including e-mail communications, referring or relating to any other DNC-planned events that have used, discussed the use of, or proposed to use any room of the

⁷ See, e.g., Josh Gerstein and Jake Sherman, *Issa seeks DNC records of White House meeting*, POLITICO, July 13, 2011, available at <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0711/58908.html>.

⁸ Letter from Chairman Darrell Issa to Kathryn Ruemmler, July 11, 2011, http://www.politico.com/static/PPM153_camp.html

⁹ Josh Gerstein, *Donor meeting at White House draws fire*, POLITICO, June 20, 2011, available at http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0611/57389_Page2.html#ixzz1XyAgzFrm

¹⁰ Lynn Sweet, *Democratic National Committee Fall Meeting in Chicago Friday, Saturday. Illinois DNC Chair Mike Madigan to Surface at Event*, CHICAGO SUN-TIMES, Sept. 8, 2011, http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2011/09/democratic_national_committee_11.html.

¹¹ Ben Smith, *Jobs Act Website Gets Political*, POLITICO, Sept. 13, 2011, http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0911/Jobs_Act_website_gets_political.html.

¹² Daniel Strauss, *DNC Launches Ad Campaign To Promote Obama Jobs Plan*, THE HILL, Sept. 12, 2011, <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/180819-dnc-promotes-obama-jobs-plan-with-ad-campaign>; Erica Werner, *DNC Ad Campaign to Promote Obama Jobs Plan:*

Group Focusing on Politically Key States to Rally the Public Behind a Divided Congress, MSNBC, Sept. 12, 2011, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/44486501/ns/politics-more_politics/#.TnDwCdT46rY.

¹³ See Steve Tetreault, *Democrats Target Las Vegas to Promote Obama Jobs Plan*, LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL, Sept. 12, 2011, <http://www.lvrj.com/news/democrats-target-las-vegas-to-promote-obama-jobs-plan-129673333.html?ref=333>

White House, the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, the New Executive Office Building, or any other federal property on or off the White House grounds.

4. All documents and materials relating to the production of the “Dinner with Barack and Joe” presidential campaign fundraising video, including any raw video footage or script-related materials.
5. All documents referring or relating to the use of federal personnel for fundraising purposes, including having federal employees attend fundraising events.
6. All documents, including e-mail communications and receipts, referring or relating to solicitations made to White House employees by: the DNC, Obama for America, or any other political fundraising entity concerning donations or other contributions
7. All documents inviting or encouraging federal personnel to attend any White House event sponsored or planned in whole or in part by the DNC.
8. All documents between any federal personnel and any personnel, officers, agents, or representatives of the DNC or any DNC-affiliated committee referring or relating to the American Jobs Act of 2011. This request shall also capture all documents referring or relating to communications between any federal personnel and any personnel, officers, agents, or representatives of the DNC or any DNC affiliated committee referencing the American Jobs Act of 2011.
9. All documents and internal communications which reference the DNC and/or any DNC-affiliated committee and the American Jobs Act of 2011.
10. All documents, including e-mail communications, referring to, relating to, or including as an author or recipient, any federal personnel and
 - a. any personnel, officers, agents, or representatives of the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union (“PACE”) or
 - b. any personnel, officers, agents, or representatives of the United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied-Industrial and Service Workers International Union (also known as the “United Steelworkers” or “USW”).
11. All documents referring or relating to, or including as a recipient or respondent, Patrick Gaspard, the DNC’s Executive Director; Jim Messina, the Political Director of the Obama for America re-election campaign; Martin Nesbitt, the Treasurer of the Obama for America re-election campaign; Madeline Talbott, the former director of Project Vote in Chicago; and/or the “Presidential Partners” entity—including its relationship to the PACE and/or the USW.
12. All documents referring or relating to communications between the OSC and Members of Congress, including but not limited to Committee Chairmen and/or Ranking Members, referring or relating to
 - a. Ethics waivers,
 - b. The White House Blue Room Event of March 7, 2011,
 - c. Any event coordinated between the White House and the DNC, or

d. The Hatch Act.

Freedom Through Justice Qualifies Under the Non-Commercial Fee Category

The Freedom Through Justice Foundation requests a waiver of both search and duplication fees pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(ii)(II) and 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii). The Freedom Through Justice Foundation is a 501(c)(3), not-for-profit, representative of the news media and has no commercial purpose in requesting information. Freedom Through Justice has no commercial, trade or profit interests and is organized and operated to publish or broadcast news to the general public. Freedom Through Justice will use its editorial skills to turn raw materials into a distinct work.

Freedom Through Justice Is Entitled to a Complete Waiver of Fees

Freedom Through Justice requests a waiver of fees as a representative of the news media under 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(ii)(II). The disclosure of the requested information is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations and activities of the government and is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii). *See, e.g., Carney v. U.S. Dep't of Justice*, 19 F.3d 807, 814 n.3 (2d Cir. 1994); *Prison Legal News v. Lappin*, 436 F. Supp. 2d 17, 27 n.5 (D.D.C. 2006).

The subject matter of the requested records specifically concerns identifiable “operations or activities of the government.” The disclosable portions of the requested information will be meaningfully informative in relation to this request. This disclosure will contribute to the understanding of the public at large, as opposed to the individual understanding of the requester or a narrow segment of interested persons. Freedom Through Justice has a dynamic and diverse staff whose range of expertise includes a combined 15 years of government oversight, investigative reporting, and federal public interest litigation experience.

Production of Documents and Contact Information

We call your attention to President Obama’s January 21, 2009 Memorandum concerning the Freedom of Information Act, in which he states:

All agencies should adopt a presumption in favor of disclosure, in order to renew their commitment to the principles embodied in FOIA. . . . The presumption of disclosure should be applied to all decisions involving FOIA.¹⁴

If any responsive record or portion thereof is claimed to be exempt from production under FOIA, please provide sufficient identifying information with respect to each allegedly

¹⁴ PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, *Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, Subject: Freedom of Information Act*, Jan. 21, 2009, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/freedom-information-act>.

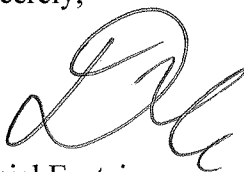
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exempt record or portion thereof to allow us to assess the propriety of the claimed exemption. *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973), *cert. denied*, 415 U.S. 977 (1974). In addition, any reasonably segregable portion of a responsive record must be provided, after redaction of any allegedly exempt material. 5 U.S.C. § 552(b).

In an effort to facilitate record production within the statutory time limit, the Freedom Through Justice Foundation prefers to accept documents in electronic format (e.g. e-mail, .pdfs). When necessary, the Freedom Through Justice Foundation will accept the “rolling production” of documents.

If you do not understand this request or any portion thereof, or if you feel you require clarification of this request or any portion thereof, please contact us immediately via J. Keith Gates (Keith.Gates@ftjfoundation.org) or Tyler Martinez (Tyler.Martinez@ftjfoundation.org) or at 703-875-8625. We look forward to receiving the requested documents and a waiver of both search and duplication costs within twenty (20) business days. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Epstein', written in a cursive style.

Daniel Epstein
Executive Director
Freedom Through Justice Foundation

Encl. “Responding to Records Requests” and “Definitions” for the purposes of this request.

Responding to Document Requests

1. In complying with this request, you should produce all responsive documents that are in your possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or your past or present agents, employees, and representatives acting on your behalf. You should also produce documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that you have a right to copy or to which you have access, as well as documents that you have placed in the temporary possession, custody, or control of any third party. Requested records, documents, data or information should not be destroyed, modified, removed, transferred or otherwise made inaccessible to the Freedom Through Justice Foundation.
2. In the event that any entity, organization or individual denoted in this request has been, or is also known by any other name than that herein denoted, the request shall be read also to include that alternative identification.
3. The Freedom Through Justice Foundation's preference is to receive documents in electronic form (i.e., CD, memory stick, or thumb drive) in lieu of paper productions.
4. When you produce documents, you should identify the paragraph in the Freedom Through Justice Foundation's request to which the documents respond.
5. It shall not be a basis for refusal to produce documents that any other person or entity also possesses non-identical or identical copies of the same documents.
6. If any of the requested information is only reasonably available in machine-readable form (such as on a computer server, hard drive, or computer backup tape), you should consult with the Freedom Through Justice Foundation staff to determine the appropriate format in which to produce the information.
7. If compliance with the request cannot be made in full, compliance shall be made to the extent possible and shall include an explanation of why full compliance is not possible.
8. In the event that a document is withheld on the basis of privilege, provide a privilege log containing the following information concerning any such document: (a) the privilege asserted; (b) the type of document; (c) the general subject matter; (d) the date, author and addressee; and (e) the relationship of the author and addressee to each other.
9. If any document responsive to this request was, but no longer is, in your possession, custody, or control, identify the document (stating its date, author, subject and

recipients) and explain the circumstances under which the document ceased to be in your possession, custody, or control.

10. If a date or other descriptive detail set forth in this request referring to a document is inaccurate, but the actual date or other descriptive detail is known to you or is otherwise apparent from the context of the request, you should produce all documents which would be responsive as if the date or other descriptive detail were correct.
11. The time period covered by this request is included in the attached request. To the extent a time period is not specified, produce relevant documents from January 1, 2009 to the present.
12. This request is continuing in nature and applies to any newly-discovered information. Any record, document, compilation of data or information, not produced because it has not been located or discovered by the return date, shall be produced immediately upon subsequent location or discovery.
13. All documents shall be Bates-stamped sequentially and produced sequentially.

Definitions

1. The term "document" means any written, recorded, or graphic matter of any nature whatsoever regardless of how recorded, and whether original or copy, including, but not limited to, the following: memoranda, reports, expense reports, books, manuals, instructions, financial reports, working papers, records, notes, letters, notices, confirmation, telegrams, receipts, appraisals, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, prospectuses, inter-office and intra-office communications, electronic mail (e-mail), contracts, cables, notations of any type of conversation, telephone call, meeting or other communication, bulletins, printed matter, computer printouts, teletypes, invoices, transcripts, diaries, analyses, returns, summaries, minutes, bills, accounts, estimates, projections, comparisons, messages, correspondence, press releases, circulars, financial statements, reviews, opinions, offers, studies and investigations, questionnaires and surveys, and work sheets (and all drafts, preliminary versions, alterations, modifications, revisions, changes, and amendments of any of the foregoing, as well as any attachments or appendices thereto), and graphic or oral records or representations of any kind (including without limitation, photographs, charts, graphs, microfiche, microfilm, videotape, recordings and motion pictures), and electronic, mechanical, and electric records or representations of any kind (including, without limitation, tapes, cassettes, disks, and recordings) and other written, printed, typed, or other graphic or recorded matter of any kind or nature, however produced or reproduced, and whether preserved in writing, film, tape, disk, videotape or otherwise. A document bearing any notation not a part of the original text is to be considered a separate document. A draft or non-identical copy is a separate document within the meaning of this term.

2. The term "communication" means each manner or means of disclosure or exchange of information, regardless of means utilized, whether oral, electronic, by document or otherwise, and whether in a meeting, by telephone, facsimile, email, regular mail, telexes, releases, or otherwise.
3. The terms "and" and "or" shall be construed broadly and either conjunctively or disjunctively to bring within the scope of this request any information which might otherwise be construed to be outside its scope. The singular includes plural number, and vice versa. The masculine includes the feminine and neuter genders.
4. The terms "person" or "persons" mean natural persons, firms, partnerships, associations, corporations, subsidiaries, divisions, departments, joint ventures, proprietorships, syndicates, or other legal, business or government entities, and all subsidiaries, affiliates, divisions, departments, branches, or other units thereof.
5. The term "identify," when used in a question about individuals, means to provide the following information: (a) the individual's complete name and title; and (b) the individual's business address and phone number.
6. The term "referring or relating," with respect to any given subject, means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, reflects, identifies, states, refers to, deals with or is pertinent to that subject in any manner whatsoever.