

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUEST**

November 24, 2022

Mark Bittner  
Department of the Treasury  
Director, FOIA & Transparency  
1500 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20220

BY EMAIL: [foiapl@treasury.gov](mailto:foiapl@treasury.gov)

### **Re: FOIA Request - Certain work-related GMail correspondence**

Dear Mr. Bittner or Records Officer:

On behalf of Energy Policy Advocates, a non-profit public policy institute organized under the laws of Washington state, pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552 *et seq.*, please provide copies of all electronic correspondence, and any accompanying information (e.g., metadata, requiring native format, and any attachments, dated from April 1, 2021 through November 22, 2022, for a) Secretary Janet Yellen, b) Climate Counselor John E. Morton, and/or c) Didem Nisanci, that:

- 1) was sent to or from or copying their Treasury email account(s) that was also sent to or from (e.g., forwarded to or between accounts) their Gmail account; and that which
- 2) was otherwise sent to or from or copies their GMail account, i.e., was not to or from their Treasury account(s) but which also includes, *anywhere*: i) Treasury, ii) climate risk, iii) TCFD, iv) ESG, v) climate-related, vi) social cost of carbon, vii) @bloomberg.net, and/or viii) Schapiro (the latter two terms include in, e.g., mlschapiro@bloomberg.net).

The above terms are *not* case sensitive.

The public record establishes that each of these parties uses their GMail accounts to correspond on Treasury-related matters and, by above the search parameters, the requested records are inherently, presumptively work-related and thereby covered by FOIA.

We request entire “threads” of which any responsive electronic correspondence is a part, regardless whether any portion falls outside of the above time parameter.

**To narrow this request, please consider as non-responsive electronic correspondence that merely receives newsletters or press summaries or ‘clippings’, such as news services or stories or opinion pieces, from the original source (e.g., Politico, New York Times).**

Regarding the emails sent to or from the Treasury accounts (item “1”), Energy Policy Advocates requests records on your system, e.g., its backend logs, and does not seek only those records which survive on an employee’s own machine or account.

We do not demand your office produce requested information in any particular format, instead **we request records in their native form**, with specific reference to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission Data Delivery Standards. The covered information we seek is electronic information, this includes electronic *records*, and other public *information*.

To quote the SEC Data Delivery Standards, “Electronic files must be produced in their native format, i.e. the format in which they are ordinarily used and maintained during the normal course of business. For example, an MS Excel file must be produced as an MS Excel file rather than an image of a spreadsheet. *(Note: An Adobe PDF file is not considered a native file unless the document was initially created as a PDF.)*” (emphases in original).

In many native-format productions, certain public information remains contained in the record (e.g., metadata). Under the same standards, to ensure production of all information requested, if your production will be de-duplicated it is vital that you 1) preserve any unique

metadata associated with the duplicate files, for example, custodian name, and, 2) make that unique metadata part of your production.

Native file productions may be produced without load files. However, native file productions must maintain the integrity of the original meta data, and must be produced as they are maintained in the normal course of business and organized by custodian-named file folders. A separate folder should be provided for each custodian.

In the event that necessity requires your office to produce a PDF file, due to your normal program for redacting certain information and such that native files cannot be produced as they are maintained in the normal course of business, in order to provide all requested information each PDF file should be produced in separate folders named by the custodian, *and* accompanied by a load file to ensure the requested information appropriate for that discrete record is associated with that record. The required fields and format of the data to be provided within the load file can be found in Addendum A of the above-cited SEC Data Standards. All produced PDFs must be text searchable.

### **Request for Fee Waiver**

We request the Department of the Treasury waive or substantially reduce any fees associated with this request. **Our request for fee waiver is in the alternative, first for reasons of significant public interest, and second, on the basis of the Energy Policy Advocates' status as a media outlet.** We do not seek the information for a commercial purpose. Energy Policy Advocates is organized and recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 educational organization. It actively publishes and broadly disseminates public records pertaining to energy and environmental policymaking. The requester has no commercial interest possible in these records.

The below clearly demonstrates that:

The requested information is of widespread public, media and legislative interest.

Requester is a non-profit classified as such by the Internal Revenue Service.

Requester does not seek these records for a commercial purpose and has no commercial interest possible in these records.

**1. The Requester intends to broadly disseminate the information requested.**

The Requester has both the intent and the ability to convey any information obtained through this request to the public. Energy Policy Advocates publishes its finding regularly through the organization's website, [www.epadvocates.org](http://www.epadvocates.org). This work is frequently cited in newspapers and trade and political publications.<sup>1</sup> Requester intends to broadly disseminate public information obtained under this FOIA as it has other information relevant to its mission and work.

**2. Disclosure is "likely to contribute" to an understanding of specific government operations or activities because the releasable material will be meaningfully informative in relation to the subject matter of the request.**

The requested records, if they exist, pertain to Treasury working as part of the current administration's "whole of government" approach to imposing a "climate" agenda through executive action, which is not only of major media, public and policy interest but occupies a substantial part of all three named officials' official time. Any records responsive to this request therefore are likely to have an informative value and are "likely to contribute to an understanding of Federal government operations or activities".

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., recent coverage at Editorial, *Wall Street Journal*, "Biden's 'BackDoor' Climate Plan," March 17, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/bidens-backdoor-climate-plan-11616020338>, and Stuart Parker, "Conservative Group Says States' Ozone Suit 'Trojan Horse' for GHG Limits," Inside EPA, February 24, 2021.

**3. The disclosure will contribute to the understanding of the public at large, as opposed to merely that of the requester or a narrow segment of interested persons.**

Energy Policy Advocates is dedicated to and has a documented record of promoting the public interest, advocating sensible policies to protect human health and the environment, broadly disseminating information relevant to the policy issues on which its experts work. With a demonstrated interest and record in the relevant policy debates and expertise in the subject of energy- and environment-related regulatory policies, Energy Policy Advocates unquestionably has the “specialized knowledge” and “ability and intention” to disseminate the information requested in the broad manner, and to do so in a manner that contributes to the understanding of the “public at-large.”

**4. The disclosure will contribute “significantly” to public understanding of government operations or activities.**

The Requester repeats and incorporates here by reference the arguments above from the discussion of how disclosure is “likely to contribute” to an understanding of specific government operations or activities.

The Requester has stated “with reasonable specificity that its request pertains to operations of the government,” and that it intends to broadly disseminate responsive records. Therefore, **Energy Policy Advocates first seeks waiver of any fees** under FOIA on the above significant public interest basis. Disclosure of records responsive to this request will contribute “significantly” to public understanding of government operations or activities. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a) (4)(A)(iii) (“Documents shall be furnished without any charge...if disclosure of the information is in the public interest because it is likely to

contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of government and is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester”).

**In the alternative**, Energy Policy Advocates requests a waiver or reduction of fees as a representative of the news media. The provisions for determining whether a requesting party is a representative of the news media, and the “significant public interest” provision, are not mutually exclusive. As Energy Policy Advocates is a non-commercial requester, it is entitled to liberal construction of the fee waiver standards. 5 U.S.C.S. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii), *Perkins v. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, 754 F.Supp.2d. 1 (D.D.C. 2010). Alternately and only in the event the Department of the Treasury refuses to waive our fees under the “significant public interest” test, which Requester would then appeal while requesting the Department of the Treasury proceed with processing on the grounds that Energy Policy Advocates is a media organization, a designation the federal government has acknowledged for the purposes of FOIA.<sup>2</sup> Requester asks for a waiver or limitation of processing fees pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(ii) (“fees shall be limited to reasonable standard charges for document duplication when records are not sought for commercial use and the request is made by.... a representative of the news media...”).

**The Department of the Treasury must address both of these requests for fee waiver in the event it denies one; failure to do so is *prima facie* arbitrary and capricious.**

Energy Policy Advocates looks forward to your response.



Rob Schilling  
Executive Director  
Energy Policy Advocates  
[Schilling@allhookedup.com](mailto:Schilling@allhookedup.com)

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Securities & Exchange Commission Requests No. 21-00769-FOIA, No. 21-01234- FOIA, 22-00557-FOIA, 22-01573-FOIA; Department of the Interior Request No. DOI-OS- 2021-003335.