

October 1, 2018

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL: Efoia@doc.gov

Bobbie Parsons
U.S. Department of Commerce
Office of the Secretary
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Ms. Parsons:

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (“CREW”) makes this request for records pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and U.S. Department of Commerce regulations.

CREW requests copies of records sufficient to show all of Secretary Ross’s scheduled meetings, appointments, and scheduled events for July 16 through 18, 2018, including but not limited to Outlook calendar entries and daily briefing books for Secretary Ross on those dates.

Please search for responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. We seek records of any kind, including paper records, electronic records, audiotapes, videotapes, photographs, data, and graphical material. Our request includes without limitation all correspondence, letters, emails, text messages, facsimiles, telephone messages, voice mail messages, and transcripts, notes, or minutes of any meetings, telephone conversations, or discussions. Our request also includes any attachments to emails and other records, as well as those who were cc’ed or bcc’ed on any emails.

If it is your position any portion of the requested records is exempt from disclosure, CREW requests that you provide it with an index of those documents as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973). 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. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 552(b). 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. *See Mead Data Central v. U.S. Dep’t of the Air Force*, 566 F.2d 242, 261 (D.C. Cir. 1977).

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A) and Commerce Department regulations, CREW 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 likely will

contribute to a better understanding of relevant government procedures by CREW and the general public in a significant way. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii). Moreover, the request primarily and fundamentally is for non-commercial purposes. *See, e.g., McClellan Ecological v. Carlucci*, 835 F.2d 1282, 1285 (9th Cir. 1987).

A recent and substantial decrease in the level of detail the Interior Department includes in Secretary Zinke's calendars raises concerns that other cabinet secretaries' calendars may be similarly lacking in information. A review of Secretary Zinke's calendars on the Interior Department's website reveals that the more recent entries contain far more general descriptions such as "external meeting" in lieu of identifying with whom the Secretary met. This lack of detail raises the concern that the Interior Department has altered its process for populating Secretary Zinke's calendars to avoid the full transparency that disclosure under the FOIA brings. The requested records would shed light on whether that or a similar practice extends to the Commerce Department and whether the Department is complying fully with the letter and spirit of the FOIA, which is one of the most effective tools Congress provided to make our government more accountable through increased transparency.

CREW is a non-profit corporation, organized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. CREW is committed to protecting the public's right to be aware of the activities of government officials, to ensuring the integrity of those officials, and to highlighting and working to reduce the influence of money on politics. CREW uses a combination of research, litigation, and advocacy to advance its mission. CREW intends to analyze the information responsive to this request and to share its analysis with the public through reports, press releases, or other means. In addition, CREW will disseminate any documents it acquires from this request to the public through its website, www.citizensforethics.org. The release of information obtained through this request is not in CREW's financial interest.

CREW further requests that it not be charged search or review fees for this request pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(ii)(II) because CREW qualifies as a member of the news media. *See Nat'l Sec. Archive v. U.S. Dep't of Defense*, 880 F.2d 1381, 1386 (D.C. Cir. 1989) (holding non-profit a "representative of the news media" and broadly interpreting the term to include "any person or organization which regularly publishes or disseminates information to the public").

CREW routinely and systematically disseminates information to the public in several ways. CREW's website receives tens of thousands of page views every month. The website includes a blog that reports on and analyzes newsworthy developments regarding government ethics, corruption, and money in politics, as well as numerous reports CREW has published to educate the public about these issues. In addition, CREW posts the documents it receives under the FOIA on its website, which has been visited hundreds of thousands of times.

Under these circumstances, CREW satisfies fully the criteria for a fee waiver.

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Conclusion

If you have any questions about this request or foresee any problems in fully releasing the requested records, please contact me at (202) 897-1845 or mlerner@citizensforethics.org. Also, if CREW's request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact our office immediately upon making such a determination.

Where possible, please produce records in electronic format. Please send the requested records to me either at mlerner@citizensforethics.org or Meredith Lerner, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, 455 Massachusetts Ave., N.W, Washington, D.C. 20001. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Meredith Lerner".

Meredith Lerner
Research Associate