



SUNSHINE WEEK | MARCH 11 - 17

COMMITTEE ON

OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

DEMOCRATS

## Shining a Light on Secrecy in the Trump Administration

On June 6, 2012, Donald Trump [tweeted](#) that President Barack Obama was the “least transparent president—ever.” His claim defied reality as the Obama Administration took groundbreaking steps to improve government transparency, including [releasing](#) White House visitor logs, [instituting](#) a presumption of openness under FOIA, [issuing](#) a landmark Open Government Directive, and [establishing](#) the National Declassification Center. Now that President Trump is 14 months into his term, grave questions have been raised about whether he is one of the most secretive presidents in history.

- **Keeping Secret Trump’s Tax Returns:** President Trump has refused to release his tax returns and defied [warnings](#) from Republican and Democratic ethics experts by refusing to do what every previous president has done for decades—to divest himself of his corporate ownership interests, liquidate his business assets, and place them in a truly blind trust operated by an independent entity.
- **Keeping Secret White House Visitor Logs:** On April 14, 2017, the Trump Administration [announced](#) that it was reversing the Obama Administration’s policy of voluntarily disclosing logs of visitors to the White House. A [lawsuit](#) forced President Trump to release at least some of those records.
- **Dramatic Increase in Freedom of Information Act Lawsuits:** The number of FOIA lawsuits filed against the government increased 50% in the first year of the Trump Administration. There were 671 [lawsuits](#) filed between January 20, 2017, and December 31, 2017, but 448 FOIA [lawsuits](#) filed against the Obama Administration in 2016.
- **Withholding Documents on Security Clearances:** After Ranking Member Cummings warned for more than a year about grave problems with the White House’s security clearance process, Chairman Gowdy finally sent letters to the White House and FBI about former Staff Secretary Robert Porter and the extent to which White House officials have been working for extended periods with only interim security clearances. The White House responded with a five paragraph [letter](#) that provided none of the information the Committee requested. The White House also ignored a [letter](#) sent by all Democratic Committee Members requesting documents regarding procedures for suspending security clearances, as well as its decision not to suspend the security clearances of former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn and Senior Adviser Jared Kushner.
- **Withholding Documents on Foreign Payments to Trump Businesses:** On February 26, 2018, the Trump Organization announced that it made a payment to the Treasury, but [refused](#) to answer any questions about which properties were included in the accounting or which foreign entities paid money to the President’s businesses. In April 2017, the Oversight Committee [sent](#) a bipartisan letter requesting documents about President Trump’s plan, but the Trump Organization [responded](#) with only a glossy pamphlet.

- **Keeping Secret the Identities of Regulatory Task Force Members:** Many agencies have [refused](#) to disclose the identities of individuals serving on Regulatory Reform Task Forces that President Trump required each agency to create. Democratic Members [requested](#) the names of all Task Force participants, but the Departments of Commerce, Homeland Security, Justice, Labor, State, and the Small Business Administration have refused to answer [letters](#) sent on February 7, 2018.
- **Withholding Documents on Trump Hotel:** Democratic Members were forced to file a [lawsuit](#) against the Trump Administration for withholding documents for more than a year relating to the Trump Hotel in Washington, D.C. Although the previous Administration had provided similar information to Congress, on March 8, 2018, the Inspector General of the General Services Administration issued a [report](#) finding that “GSA began to deviate from its prior practices for responding to congressional inquiries, based on oral guidance and direction from the White House.”
- **Withholding Information About Emails that Violate the Presidential Records Act:** On September 25, 2017, Ranking Member Cummings [requested](#) that Senior Advisor to the President Jared Kushner provide a list of all emails in which he conducted official business on private accounts on nongovernmental servers. Mr. Kushner refused. The Committee also [requested](#) information about use by other White House staff of personal email accounts, alias email accounts, texts, or encrypted applications. In a briefing, White House attorneys admitted that White House staff “[confessed](#)” they violated the law, but the White House has not provided the information requested by the Committee.
- **Withholding Documents on Response to Hurricanes in Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands:** The White House has refused to provide any [documents](#) about its preparation for, and response to, Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. In addition, the Department of Homeland Security has refused to provide documents about its [failed contract](#) with a one-person company to deliver 30 million emergency meals. The Department of Defense has provided only a few pages of emails in response to a Committee [request](#) about its preparation and response to the hurricanes.
- **Withholding Documents on Ambush of Four Servicemembers in Niger:** The White House has refused to provide information about the deadly ambush in Niger on October 4, 2017, that killed four U.S. Special Forces troops. On October 25, 2017, Ranking Member Cummings [requested](#) a briefing, but the White House has refused to even talk about the incident.
- **Withholding Documents on Travel by White House Officials on Private Jets:** The White House is withholding documents about trips taken by Trump Administration officials on private jets. President Trump fired Tom Price, the former Secretary of Health and Human Services, for taking dozens of non-commercial flights at taxpayer expense, some of which were also joined by Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway. Chairman Gowdy and Ranking Member Cummings [requested](#) documents from the White House about these and other flights, but the White House has stonewalled the Committee.