

Judicial Watch: Free the Tapes, While We're at It, What Did President Obama Know?

The government watchdog group Judicial Watch launched two new initiatives Monday evening.

In a motion filed in an existing lawsuit, the group requested that all of the videotaped depositions conducted as part of an inquiry into former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's private email server be made public. Then, they filed a new Freedom of Information Act lawsuit seeking email communications between President Barack Obama and key staffers regarding convicted felon former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

In the motion to release the recorded depositions, Judicial Watch argues:

[T]he Court has stated, "The public has a right to know details related to the creation, purpose and use of the system."

Because the public has a right to know, the audiovisual recordings of the depositions in this case must be unsealed. The sole reason for sealing the recordings in the first place was to avoid their misuse during the 2016 campaign season. Now that the election is over, that reason no longer exists.

Prior to her deposition, Mills moved for a court seal on the audiovisual recordings of her deposition. Subsequently, the court granted Ms. Mills' motion and also sealed the audiovisual recordings of all depositions until further

notice.

A coalition of 19 media outlets has written to the judge in the case in support of the release of the videos. The motion is opposed by attorneys representing:

- The State Department
- Former State Department Deputy Chief of Staff Huma Abedin
- Former State Department Director of Information Resource Management of the Executive Secretariat John Bentel
- Former State Department Chief of Staff Cheryl D. Mills
- Former State Department IT staffer Bryan Pagliano

“The public and the media have a right to see these deposition videos of top officials from the Clinton State Department,” Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton said. “The courts and the continued work of Judicial Watch is clearly the only hope of bringing sunlight into the Clinton email issue and completing the public record.”

Judicial Watch’s FOIA lawsuit against the Department of Justice seeks access to FBI “302” reports of interviews of President Obama, Valerie Jarrett and Rahm Emanuel taken as part of its criminal investigation of Blagojevich. The investigation was looking into the then-governor’s efforts to “sell” Obama’s vacated Senate seat to the highest bidder after the 2008 election.

Blagojevich was convicted of 18 separate offenses and, in December 2011, was sentenced to 168 months in federal prison. Several of the convictions were overturned by an appeals court, but in August of this year, he was re-sentenced to the original 168 months.

Judicial Watch had made a FOIA demand for the 302s in June of 2011. The existence of the records was confirmed in 2012, but denied on the grounds that they were exempt from disclosure because Blagojevich’s criminal case was still ongoing.

Judicial Watch filed suit to try to obtain the 302s in May 2016, after the U.S. Supreme Court declined to review Blagojevich's convictions. It closed that initial lawsuit while Blagojevich was being resentenced, but now that he has been re-sentenced, it has refiled the suit, which states:

[U]nder the circumstances it cannot be said that release of the requested records could reasonably be expected to interfere with whatever is left of Blagojevich's criminal prosecution. The public should not be forced to wait any longer to review the FBI 302s of President Obama, former White House Chief of Staff and now City of Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, or Senior Adviser to the President Valerie Jarrett while Blagojevich pursues his second, plainly futile appeal.

"The FBI interviewed Barack Obama eight years ago about the selling of his Senate seat," Fitton said. "The American people should finally get to see these FBI interview reports. The public has a right to know precisely how Obama and his senior White House advisers Emanuel and Jarrett responded to Blagojevich's corrupt attempts sell Obama's Senate seat."