

State Department Sat on FOIA Demands for More Than a Year

Thursday, the government watchdog group released more State Department documents that this time reveal that top-level department officials were concerned as early as August of 2013 about former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's emails and the number of Freedom of Information Act demands for information about them.

However, those 113 pages of documents—despite knowledge of 17 FOIA demands, four of which specifically name “emails” and “email accounts”—don't indicate why the department waiting more than a full year to request those emails from Clinton. The State Department officially asked for Clinton's emails from her server in October of 2014.

The new State Department documents records were obtained by Judicial Watch under court order in a FOIA lawsuit against the State Department for all records regarding the processing of a December 2012 FOIA request filed by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. That FOIA demand sought “all records sufficient to show the number of email accounts of or associated with Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton,” but the State Department stated in May 2013 that no responsive records had been located.

In its report earlier this year, the State Department Office of Inspector General said that response was “inaccurate and incomplete.” According to the newly obtained documents, by early August 2013, top State Department officials raised questions about FOIA requests seeking information related to the Clinton emails.

On Aug. 7, 2013, Margaret Grafeld, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Global Information Services, asked two other

State Department officials in the Office of Information Programs and Services for copies of requests for Clinton's emails. One of those officials, OIPS Director Sheryl Walter, forwarded that request to State Department program analyst Geoffrey Hermesman, who responded that there were 17 FOIA requests, of which four specifically requested emails.

A short time later that same day, Karen Finnegan, division chief of the State Department's freedom of information program, responded, as well:

Sheryl: To follow-up on my early response, Cristina is handling the Judicial Watch case, CA No. 2013-772 (DDC) (J. Kollar-Kotelly), that seeks access to all communications (including email) between the Department and President Clinton and/or his foundation regarding clearing his speeches [Redacted]

In August, Judicial Watch released 10 pages of State Department records that included an email sent by spokesman Brock Johnson, alerting Clinton's chief of staff, Cheryl Mills, that a "significant" FOIA demand had been made for records showing the number of email accounts used by Clinton while secretary of state. The organization's president, Tom Fitton, said this proves there was a cover-up that included Obama administration officials, who should also be included in a criminal investigation.

"These new emails suggest that the Obama State Department knew about the Clinton email problem at least three years but covered it up," he said. "Any criminal investigation of the Clinton email scandal must include officials in the Obama administration."