

# White House releases limited visitor logs after settlement

BY MEGAN R. WILSON - 04/11/18 04:09 PM EDT

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The Trump administration on Wednesday released a trove of White House visitor records as part of a settlement with groups that had sued to obtain them.

The records show who visited the White House's Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Center for Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), primarily in February.

Visitor logs for the Office of National Drug Control Policy also will be posted soon as a result of the settlement reached in February.

Public Citizen, one of the government watchdog groups who sued the administration for the records, touted the release, but said that it would be asking agencies whether they had improperly redacted some records.

"The public now can see who is visiting these four agencies, as they should have been able to see all along," Public Citizen President Robert Weissman said. "Now we'll at least have a window into the corporate and ideological lobbyists who are driving Trump administration policy."

The Secret Service will now turn over visitor log records for the four offices to the White House each month. They will then be sent to the respective agencies, which have another month to review and release them.

The White House itself, particularly the Executive Office of the President, is not considered an agency under the law and is thereby not subject to public records laws. Visitor logs for the Oval Office or other areas of the complex will not be released.

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Public Citizen said the logs showed that at least nine advocates, including officials from conservative groups and trade associations, made trips to OMB.

The logs included visits to OMB by Myron Ebell and Marlo Lewis from the Competitive Enterprise Institute, David Kreutzer of the Heritage Foundation, Jim Tozzi from the Center for Regulatory Effectiveness, Lee Janger of the Alliance for Vehicle Efficiency, Laurie Holmes of the Motor and Equipment Manufacturers Association and Hudson Hollister, who founded the Data Coalition.

Some of the visits were likely by groups meeting with officials from the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, an arm of OMB that vets regulations for executive agencies. It is common for lobbyists to talk with the office about proposed and pending rules.

The release of the OMB logs includes hundreds of redactions, according to Public Citizen. The OSTP logs included 75 redactions and six CEQ entries were redacted, many or all for personal privacy reasons.

Public Citizen said it was skeptical that all of the redactions were necessary, and in a release said it would "raise the issue with the agencies.

Although the documents shed light on who has come to these offices, the logs don't contain the titles or employers, so those with more common names may be difficult to pin down. White House logs released by the Obama administration did not contain this information, either.

Critics say the records are rife with loopholes and oversights, including the potential to redact records liberally and limit how much information is actually provided. Neither the Obama nor Trump administration versions of the logs list any details about the nature of any of the meetings, and many entries are tours by the public.

One investigation from the Center for Public Integrity found that two-thirds of the Obama visitor logs consisted of such tours, in addition to other shortcomings and omissions in the data.



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While Obama fought against the influence of K Street, lobbyists would meet with White House aides at a coffee shop across the street to avoid being caught in visitor logs.

The Trump administration, like the Obama administration, initially fought against the release of White House visitor logs. Both ended up settling with the public interest groups, including Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, that had sued them.

Both administrations argued that the records are presidential records shielded from public review.

The Obama White House reserved the right to scrub certain specific visits, including entries that would be of concern to national interest, visits from

“personal guests” of the president and vice president, and “visits that do not involve any official or political business.”

In addition, it argued it could withhold records on small groups deemed “particularly sensitive,” such as interviewees for a Supreme Court seat, though the White House pledged to retroactively release those records “once they are no longer sensitive.”

*Updated at 4:53 p.m.*

