

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
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March 9, 2018

The Honorable Trey Gowdy
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to request that you issue a subpoena to compel officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to produce documents they have been withholding from Congress since November relating to their communications with corporate lobbyists and other matters.

In September 2017, Rebeckah Adcock, a Senior Advisor to the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, met with Committee staff about the agency's Regulatory Reform Task Force. At that meeting, Committee staff asked her to provide the identities of the members of the Task Force, but she refused to do so.

On November 13, 2017, the *New York Times* published a story about her September meeting with Committee staff, reporting not only that Ms. Adcock refused to reveal the identities of the Task Force members, but also that she "maintained contact with her former industry allies despite a signed ethics agreement promising to avoid for one year."¹

The next day, on November 14, 2017, the Committee held a joint subcommittee hearing at which Ms. Adcock testified. During the hearing, Ms. Adcock was asked why she refused to provide the identities of the Task Force members to the Committee. She responded, "It is my understanding that the list has been forwarded to the Committee through our office of Congressional relations." She was then asked, "When was that?" She responded, "Could have been in the last few days, I'm not certain."²

¹ *An Open Door for Pesticide Lobbyists at the U.S.D.A.*, *New York Times* (Nov. 13, 2017) (online at www.nytimes.com/2017/11/13/business/trump-regulations-usda-lobbyists.html).

² House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Reform and Subcommittee on Healthcare, Benefits, and Administrative Rules, *Joint Hearing on Regulatory Reform Task Forces Check-In: Part II* (Nov. 14, 2017).

In fact, Republican Committee staff informed us that the list was provided to them that morning—directly before the hearing—and only after the *New York Times* reported on Ms. Adcock’s previous refusal.

When Democratic Members were informed of this fact during the hearing, Ms. Adcock was asked to clarify her testimony immediately. She was asked, “You aren’t sure when it was submitted?” She responded, “I’m not sure.”³

Later that afternoon, Committee Member Bonnie Watson Coleman sent a letter to Ms. Adcock, writing that Ms. Adcock’s “actions raise concerns about the truthfulness of your sworn testimony before the Committee.” After detailing the facts above, Rep. Watson Coleman requested answers to the following questions and copies of the following documents:

1. Were you involved in discussions about whether, and when, to provide to the Committee the identities of Task Force members prior to the hearing?
2. Who else was involved in these discussions, was the *New York Times* story discussed, and who made the final decision to provide the list to the Committee?
3. When exactly did you learn that the list would be provided to the Committee?
4. Why were Democratic Committee staff not provided a copy of the list?
5. Please provide copies of all emails to or from you referring or relating to the task force and its members from September 1, 2017, through 8 p.m. on November 14, 2017.
6. Please list the dates, times, and subject matter of all meetings with Ms. Bray or any other CropLife officials, representatives, or agents since you began working at USDA.
7. Please provide copies of all inquiries to and responses from any ethics officials relating to the propriety of your participation in these meetings.
8. Please provide copies of all emails to or from you with lobbyists, employees, or representatives of any pesticide manufacturer or associated groups.⁴

On that same day, Rep. Watson Coleman asked Committee staff to include her letter as part of the official Questions for the Record (QFRs) submitted to Ms. Adcock after the hearing. Democratic staff sent an email to Republican staff, writing, “Please see the attached letter from

³ *Id.*

⁴ Letter from Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, to Rebeckah Adcock, Senior Advisor, Department of Agriculture (Nov. 14, 2017) (online at democrats-oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2017-11-14.Bonnie%20Watson-Coleman%20to%20Adcock-DoA%20re%20QFRs.pdf).

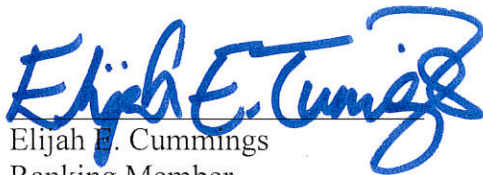
Ms. Watson Coleman to Rebeckah Adcock that was sent earlier this afternoon. She would like this included as Questions For the Record for this morning's hearing." The next day, Republican staff responded, "Yes we did receive the letter."

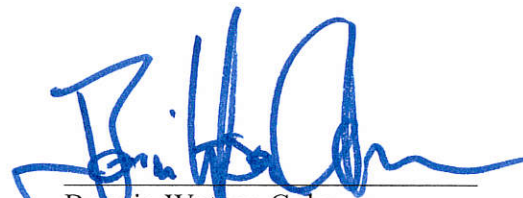
On December 1, 2017, the Department of Agriculture sent a letter to Rep. Watson Coleman assuring her that "USDA is currently reviewing your request and will respond soon."⁵ Since that time, however, the Department has provided no further information.

For these reasons, we request that you issue a subpoena to compel the Department to produce all documents requested in, and sufficient to answer the questions posed in, the letter Rep. Watson Coleman sent on November 14, 2017. If you decline to do so, we request that you place this matter on the agenda for our next regularly scheduled business meeting so all Committee members will have the opportunity to vote on a motion to subpoena responses to these questions.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,


Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member


Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member

⁵ Letter from Joby Young, Chief of Staff, Office of Congressional Relations, Department of Agriculture, to Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman, Member of Congress (Dec. 1, 2017) (online at democrats-oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/8383447-Interim_Response_to_Congresswoman_Watson_Coleman.pdf).