

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

February 7, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is continuing its investigation into the activities of the office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate (SPEC). The Committee has reviewed documents showing attempts to hide and obfuscate the influence leftist environmental organizations have over U.S. foreign policy through Envoy Kerry, who recently announced plans to depart from his role.¹ The past, present, and future activities of the SPEC office, including under the stewardship of Envoy Kerry's replacement, John Podesta,² necessitate transparency and accountability. We request additional documents and information related to interactions between Envoy Kerry and nongovernmental organizations. In addition, we demand that State immediately produce unredacted versions of documents we have repeatedly requested related to the composition of the SPEC office and payroll, especially as State has now released heavily redacted versions of these documents in a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.³

Meetings with leftist environmental organizations, sometimes collectively addressed as the "Kitchen Cabinet," go far beyond normal briefings and raise questions regarding possible conflicts of interests involving SPEC staff's ties to these groups regarding climate finance investments. The State Department claims the "Kitchen Cabinet is an existing group of NGOs that sometimes asks SPEC to brief them...nothing unusual or below board. We brief hundreds of civil society groups every year at their request, as it's essential to our mission."⁴ Documents received by the Committee illustrate that the coordination and briefings are anything but

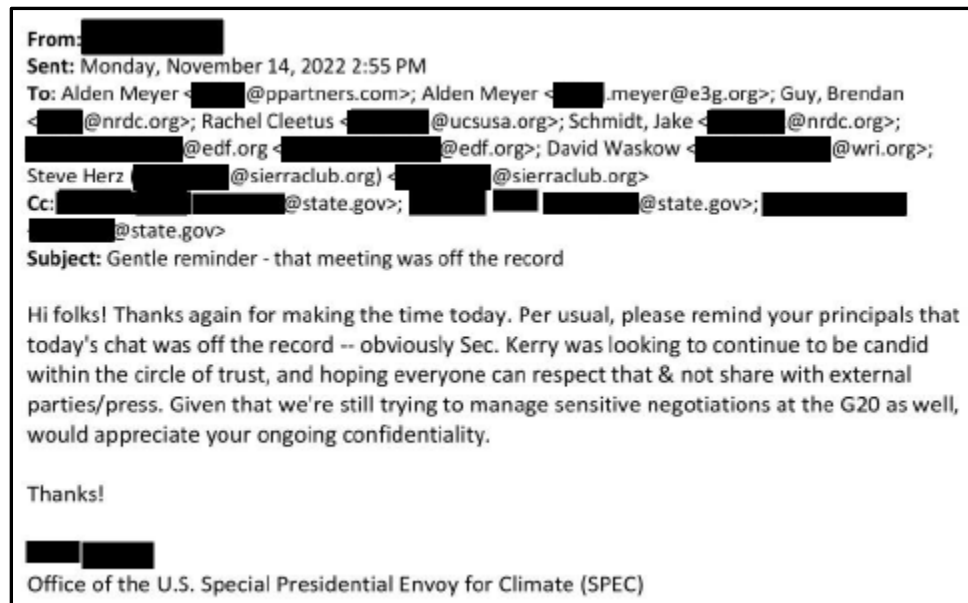
¹ Mike Allen and Andrew Freedman, *Scoop: John Kerry to leave Biden administration, help campaign*, AXIOS (Jan. 13, 2024).

² Collen Long, *John Podesta will take over for John Kerry as the US special climate change envoy, AP source says*, WASH. POST (Jan. 31, 2024).

³ See e.g. Letter from James Comer, Chairman, H. Comm. on Oversight and Accountability to John Kerry, Special Presidential Envoy, The White House (Feb. 2, 2023). Joe Dwinell, *John Kerry's Climate office costs taxpayers \$4.3M a year, yet he refuses to divulge names*, BOSTON HERALD (Jan. 8, 2024).

⁴ STATE-2023-00004-0001999.

ordinary—a two-way street exists for the purposes of obtaining “off the record” information, receiving climate finance consultation, and influencing U.S. foreign policy positions.⁵ In one example, SPEC staff reached out to remind the Kitchen Cabinet that a meeting needed to be firmly labeled “off the record.”⁶ If Envoy Kerry and SPEC staff truly viewed these meetings as usual and above board, they should not require such secrecy.

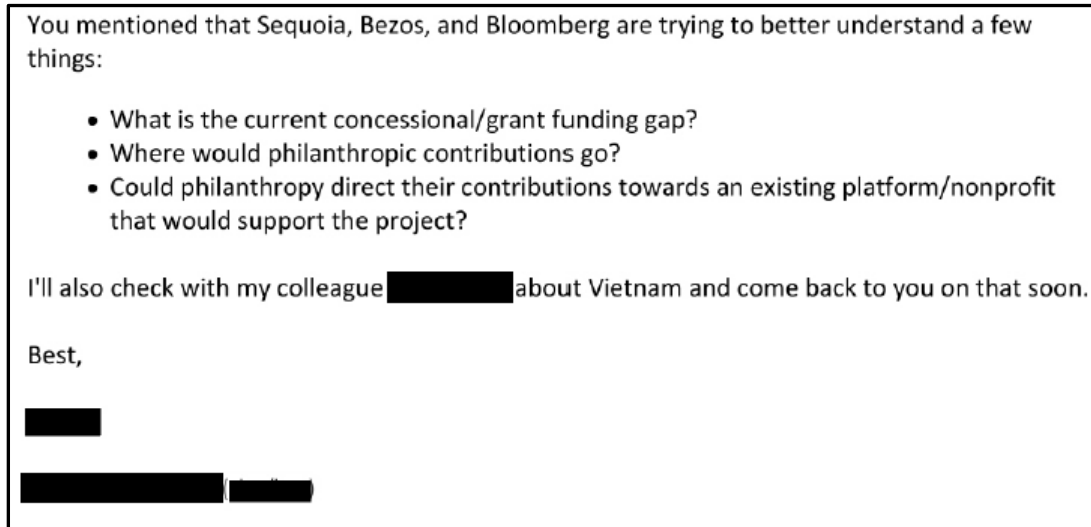


Further, the Kitchen Cabinet and other organizations including “Sequoia, Bezos, and Bloomberg” ask for and receive consultation from the SPEC office on strategic guidance for navigating “funding gap[s]” for climate-related finance action rising to the level of supporting the existence of possible wealth transfers and insider dealings involving past or present SPEC staff.⁷

⁵ See e.g. STATE-2023-00004-0000217.

⁶ STATE-2023-00004-0000217.

⁷ STATE-2023-00004-0001470.



It is unclear for what purposes “Sequoia, Bezos, and Bloomberg,” the Kitchen Cabinet, and other organizations use the information SPEC staff provides related to climate finance. The Committee has learned these groups will go as far to hire independent consultants to provide funding opportunities designated for placement of U.S. taxpayer dollars⁸—all while receiving preferential treatment from Envoy Kerry, the SPEC Office, and the State Department who distribute taxpayer dollars to fund their projects.⁹ SPEC staff—past or present—who consult outside groups regarding climate finance matters require heightened accountability for their ties to these groups.

The Committee is troubled by the frequency and content of financial-related information discussed at “off the record” meetings between the State Department, SPEC office, and outside groups considering that the Biden Administration has proposed \$1 trillion dollars in climate investments over the next ten years.¹⁰ E-mails between members of the Kitchen Cabinet and the State Department reveal consultation on those investments.¹¹ In fact, it appears the State Department hired Mark Gallogly—a Democrat donor and private equity investor¹²—for that very purpose.¹³

⁸ STATE-2023-00004-0000439 - STATE-2023-00004-0000444.

⁹ See e.g. World Resources Institute, *Annual Report 2022* (Apr. 2023).

¹⁰ Timothy Cama, *White House slaps \$1 trillion price tag on climate record*, E&E NEWS (Jan. 22, 2024).

¹¹ See e.g. STATE-2023-00004-0001661.

¹² See Brian Schwartz, *Major Obama fundraiser Mark Gallogly looks likely to support Beto O’Rourke in 2020 run for president*, CNBC NEWS (Mar. 20, 2019).

¹³ *Supra*, n.10. STATE-2023-00004-0001661.

Climate Finance:

- How will climate finance, including the GCF, be addressed in the President's Budget Request? Will the US provide a roadmap for how it is going to meet the current US GCF pledge and then double the previous pledge, as many groups on this call have called for?
- What more can you tell us about the public/private sector finance initiative that Secretary Kerry mentioned on our call with him and that we understand Mark Gallogly has been brought on board to help develop?
- What more can you tell us about the timing and focus of President Biden's forthcoming executive order on financial disclosure?

The State Department has not released any requested information to the Committee regarding the ethics and financial disclosures of past or present SPEC staff, nor any comprehensive information relating to SPEC staff identities, titles, and payroll. However, it appears the State Department did provide related FOIA documents to the *Boston Herald* after the Committee wrote you regarding the Envoy's Kerry coordination with leftist environmental groups to join the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA).¹⁴ Of 27 staff entries, the FOIA documents reveal a median staffer salary of approximately \$170,000 per year, and a combined \$4.3 million in taxpayer dollars per year for staff pay.¹⁵ SPEC staff names and titles—a specific focus of the Committee's investigation—are redacted, preventing the Committee and the public from better understanding the organizational structure makeup of the SPEC office. The American people deserve to know what is being promised by Secretary Kerry and SPEC staff in off-the-record meetings with leftist environmental groups and whether SPEC staff are undermining U.S. foreign policy, energy policy, and national security policy and discuss climate investments. SPEC staff's ties to these groups, in addition to potential foreign government officials and business interests, require transparency and accountability.

To understand Envoy Kerry's activities and the operation of the SPEC office, please provide the following documents and information as soon as possible, but no later than February 21, 2024, covering the time period January 20, 2021 to the present:

¹⁴ Letter from James Comer, Chairman, H. Comm. on Oversight and Accountability to Antony J. Blinken, Sec'y, Dep't of State (Jan. 5, 2024).

¹⁵ Joe Dwinell, *John Kerry's Climate office costs taxpayers \$4.3M a year, yet he refuses to divulge names*, BOSTON HERALD (Jan. 8, 2024).

1. A full list, including names, titles, and salaries of all individuals currently and previously employed by the office of the SPEC, as well as all ethics and financial disclosures of those individuals;¹⁶
2. Unredacted versions of all FOIA documents released to the *Boston Herald* related to Envoy Kerry and the SPEC office;
3. All documents and communications between or among Envoy Kerry, the SPEC office representatives, the State Department, and any individual or individuals containing any or all of the following terms:
 - a. “Kitchen Cabinet”;
 - b. “KC”;
 - c. “off the record”;
 - d. “funding gap”; or
 - e. “funding gaps”;
4. All documents and communications regarding the conversations held between Envoy Kerry and members of the Kitchen Cabinet referenced in State Department production bates stamped:
 - a. STATE-2023-00009-0000004;
 - b. STATE-2023-00004-0000176;
 - c. STATE-2023-00004-0000211;
 - d. STATE-2023-00004-0000978;
 - e. STATE-2023-00004-0001583; or
 - f. STATE-2023-00004-0000217; and
5. All documents and communications with any nongovernmental organization containing any unofficial or personal e-mail address owned, controlled, or operated by Envoy Kerry.

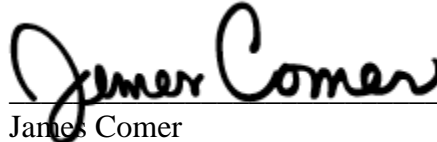
Attached are instructions for producing the documents and information to the Committee. If you have any questions, contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority staff at 202-225-5074.

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate, “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

¹⁶ Letter from James Comer, Chairman, H. Comm. on Oversight and Accountability to John Kerry, Special Presidential Envoy, The White House (Feb. 2, 2023).

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
February 7, 2024
Page 6 of 6

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "J" and "C".

James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

cc: The Honorable Jamie B. Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability