

The International Program

A Regional Project for North Africa and the Near East



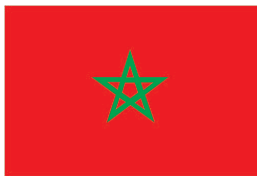
Bahrain



Egypt



Iraq



Morocco



Saudi Arabia



Tunisia

Judicial Watch hosted a delegation of international visitors at its headquarters in Washington, DC, on February 5, 2016. The delegation of ten professionals had expertise in various fields, to include political, legal, business, and government at both the local and regional levels. The delegates represented the Near East and North African countries of Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. As guests of the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), they were in the United States to participate in a project titled "Transparency in Federal, State, and Local Government."

The [U.S. Department of State](#) background studies indicate that the countries of North Africa and the Near East "play a key role in regional security architecture," and are vital partners in defense initiatives. The U.S. shares a relationship with these countries "based on a wide range of common security issues, including Middle East peace and countering terrorism."

The Department of State's professional objectives for this project were, in part, to:

- Highlight the mechanisms that enable citizens to foster good governance, ethical standards and accountability at the local, state and federal levels; and

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- Analyze grassroots actions that have resulted in honest, transparent and fair practices in government.

Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton met with the visitors and provided them with a general overview of Judicial Watch's mission and activities and the tools it uses to promote ethics and accountability in the nation's public life. He informed them that the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request is Judicial Watch's primary tool in its investigations of government wrongdoing. It is a law that provides public access to certain federal agency records and documents. (Similar laws have been enacted by state and local governments.) Underlying the enactment of open records and meetings laws is the core tenet in democratic governance that the public has the right to know what its government is doing.

Mr. Fitton told the visitors that JW has earned a reputation as one of the most active and effective users of open records laws in the country. Just within the last five years, it has filed over 3,000 FOIA requests with the current administration – and unearthed documents even Congress has been unable to obtain.

When an agency fails to provide JW with documents requested through FOIA, a lawsuit is filed to force that agency to comply with the law. The court can then compel that agency to produce the records or provide the appropriate legal exemptions for withholding them. There are [nine exemptions](#) allowed by FOIA law. Classified records relating to our national defense are exempt, as well as records already protected by statute, such as the Privacy Act, and records protected by the attorney-client and attorney work-product privileges. It is a process that typically takes months. And, Mr. Fitton told the visitors, Judicial Watch has had to file over 300 lawsuits against the Obama administration in order to ensure its compliance with the open records law.

To illustrate, Mr. Fitton discussed just how that process unfolded during JW's investigation of the September 11, 2012, terrorist attack on the American embassy in Benghazi, Libya, that took the lives of U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans. As a result of JW's diligence in its investigation of the Benghazi matter, the [smoking gun](#) Benghazi documents were uncovered that proved White House involvement in the crafting of a false narrative, blaming an

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inflammatory anti-Islam Internet video on the Benghazi massacre—all to protect the president from political fallout during his reelection campaign in 2012.

As a direct result of this Judicial Watch disclosure, a House Select Committee on Benghazi was convened to further investigate the [Benghazi](#) scandal.

Mr. Fitton concluded the meeting with a brief Q&A session and advised the delegation that the best antidote to corruption is to have a government that respects the rule of law. To help ensure that laws are faithfully executed, there must be transparency and a means to hold government officials accountable. Transparency and accountability produce a stable economic environment which is good for investment. He said that if you have to calculate who to pay off in order to make a business investment – or when courts do not uphold contracts in court – economic development suffers.

As set forth in its Mission Statement, “through its educational endeavors, Judicial Watch advocates high standards of ethics and morality in the nation’s public life and seeks to ensure that political and judicial officials do not abuse the powers entrusted to them by the American people. Judicial Watch fulfills its educational mission through [litigation](#), [investigations](#), and public outreach.” [The International Program](#) is an integral part of its educational program.