

# The International Program

## A Project for the Western Hemisphere



Judicial Watch hosted a group of international visitors from the Western Hemisphere at its headquarters in Washington, DC, on September 12, 2014. The group consisted of twenty professionals working primarily in the field of communication sciences—to include journalists, writers, editors, TV anchors and producers—representing twelve different Latin American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. 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 for the Western Hemisphere concerning “Transparency and Accountability in Government.”

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

- Explore the role of the media, watchdog organizations and citizens in monitoring and reporting on ethical standards; and
- Analyze grassroots actions that have resulted in honest, transparent and fair practices in government . . . .

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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.

Mr. Fitton informed the visitors that the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request—Judicial Watch's primary investigatory tool—is a law providing 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 public's right to know what its government is doing.

Government is a creation of the people, by the people, for the people. Elected officials are public servants. And to keep government accountable, the people must have access to its records and documents.

Mr. Fitton told the visitors that Judicial Watch has earned a reputation as one of the most active and effective users of open records laws in the country. Judicial Watch's Freedom of Information Act lawsuits have uncovered documents that force even Congress to act, such as the House Select Committee on Benghazi, which convened hearings directly as a result of the smoking gun [Benghazi documents](#) uncovered by JW. Further, a lawsuit filed by JW against the Bush administration in 2001 to obtain the [Cheney Energy Task Force documents](#) wend its way through the federal courts and was heard before the highest court in our nation, the Supreme Court of the United States. Judicial Watch alleged that the Energy Task Force violated the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). FACA is an open meetings law requiring equal access by all concerned parties at meetings when government policy is at issue and to prevent non-governmental agencies or individuals from receiving preferential access or a stake in the development of government policy.

Mr. Fitton informed the guests that Judicial Watch functions as a non-profit, non-partisan organization that is supported primarily by the donations of its hundreds of thousands of supporters across the country who believe in its mission. They are informed about JW's work through various venues, including monthly newsletters, [weekly Internet updates](#), [educational panels](#), [press releases](#), and major media [TV and radio coverage](#). JW is a conservative, non-partisan organization. It sees corruption as the by-product of Big Government: the bigger the government, the bigger the temptation, and the bigger the temptation, the bigger the corruption.

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Today with a federal budget of over \$4 trillion, Mr. Fitton said we have a lot of work ahead of us. And corruption is non-partisan; both Democrats and Republicans can be corrupt. He told the guests that Judicial Watch has a long and storied history of court battles against members of both political parties.

Mr. Fitton then candidly discussed Judicial Watch's fight against [illegal immigration](#). He told the Latin American visitors that it was their own citizens who had fallen victim to drug smugglers and cartels engaged in human trafficking—having been encouraged to come to the United States as a result of the lawless policies of both Democrat and Republican administrations over the years. He said Judicial Watch believes in the rule of law. If someone comes here illegally, they have broken the law. If amnesty is granted, law breakers are rewarded—while those who are trying to immigrate to the U.S. “legally” are punished. And, Mr. Fitton said that many who have immigrated here legally do not believe in amnesty for those who came here illegally.

He ended the meeting with a brief Q&A session and told his guests that the best antidote to corruption is to have a government that respects the rule of law. To help ensure the laws are faithfully executed, there must be transparency and a means to hold government officials accountable.

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.