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The below blog will be posted at <http://www.americanoversight.org/chao-calendar-foremost>

Elaine Chao Calendars Reveal New Links to Her Family’s Company, Including Private Photo Session

Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao’s actions on behalf of her family’s shipping company included a private photo session with her father at the Department of Transportation as well as past a speaking engagement, as revealed in new documents obtained by American Oversight.

Earlier this week, [The New York Times published a report](#) detailing extensive contacts between Secretary Chao and the Foremost Group, the business founded by her father, Dr. James Chao, and now run by her sister, Angela.

The new documents uncovered through litigation by American Oversight show that Chao held a private photo session in 2017 at the Department of Transportation in which she and her father posed for photographs with employees of the Foremost Group and several Chinese media outlets.

An entry on Chao’s calendar for March 29, 2017, includes a list of photographs to be taken, including “Secretary Chao, Dr. Chao with Foremost Group” and “another photo with Foremost employee’s family.”

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[File: Chao_March29_PhotoSession.pdf]

The Foremost Group has built deep ties with the Chinese government, and both James and Angela Chao have served on the board of a Chinese state shipbuilding company. James Chao has given millions in gifts to Chao and her husband, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and his re-election campaigns have received hundreds of thousands from Chao’s extended family. Chao has no official role with the Foremost Group, but the *Times* reported that she has used her “celebrity status” in China to promote the interests of the company. In one instance reported by the *Times*, Chao attended an event in August 2017 celebrating the signing of a deal between Foremost Group and a Japanese company; a Transportation Department “spokesman said she attended in a personal capacity and did not discuss agency business.”

The photo session documented in Chao’s calendar, however, appears to show a clear example of the secretary engaging with the Foremost Group while acting in an official capacity. The photo session took place at the Department of Transportation’s headquarters in Washington, D.C., immediately prior to a formal event celebrating the agency’s 50th anniversary at which Chao and McConnell spoke. American Oversight is filing a Freedom of Information Act request with the Transportation Department today for copies of any photos taken of Chao at the photo session.

Chao’s official calendar also includes a September 2017 awards ceremony at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, at which she spoke and introduced her father as he was presented with the academy’s “Maritime Person of the Year” award. The event program contained in the calendar lists Chao with her formal title as “US Secretary of Transportation” and describes James Chao as “Founder - Foremost Group.”

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[File: Chao_September21_Awards.pdf]

Photos of that event, including of Chao and her father, are [posted on the Foremost Foundation's website](#). A news item about the event is also [posted on the Foremost Group's website](#).

In 2018, [Politico reported on a series of interviews](#) that Chao and her father had conducted with Chinese media in April 2017, apparently recorded at the Department of Transportation with official department flags behind them. In the interview, James Chao discussed his founding of the Foremost Group.

American Oversight has been investigating Chao's potential use of her office to benefit family connections. Earlier this year, we uncovered [emails and calendar entries](#) showing [close coordination between senior Transportation Department officials and the office of Senator McConnell](#). The emails suggested that the department gave special access and treatment to Kentucky interests.

This week's *New York Times* report also prominently features an email exchange uncovered by American Oversight, which shows senior aides to Chao having worked with McConnell's staff in 2017 to arrange an ["off limits" VIP tour of the U.S. Capitol](#) for a delegation of Chinese Communist Party officials who were visiting Washington from the home region of Chao's mother.

On Friday, American Oversight filed a new lawsuit on behalf of the watchdog group Restore Public Trust to compel the release of communications between senior Transportation Department officials and a wide range of entities and people linked to the Foremost Group. Restore Public Trust submitted a FOIA request in December 2018 seeking records of Chao's correspondence related to her family's shipping company, and more than six months later, the department has not released the documents. The lawsuit also seeks the release of Chao's travel records and expenses.

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