

Solar Firm Denied Troubles in Spring

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White House officials received assurances from solar-panel maker Solyndra LLC as recently as May 2011 that its finances were strong, with the company dismissing concerns raised in media reports that problems were brewing.

Emails released by the White House Friday show the company and its lobbyists reaching out to the West Wing on several occasions. In May, less than four months before the company filed for bankruptcy protection, company representative David Miller told White House official Greg Nelson that "we have good market momentum, the factory is ramping and our plan puts at cash positive later this year."

Mr. Nelson replied, "Fantastic to hear that business is doing well—keep up the good work! We're cheering for you."


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Bloomberg News

Tyler Fagrey moves completed cylindrical shaped solar cell modules at the Solyndra Inc. manufacturing facility in Fremont, Calif.

The emails were released in response to requests from House Republican lawmakers who are investigating a \$535 million Department of Energy loan guarantee that Solyndra received in 2009 as part of the Obama administration's economic stimulus package.

In the wake of its bankruptcy filing, Solyndra is facing a federal criminal investigation connected to the guarantee. Lawmakers have accused the White House of fast-tracking the loan guarantee

for political reasons, and produced emails earlier this week suggesting the administration ignored red flags about Solyndra's finances and pressed to guarantee the loan in part so top officials, including Mr. Obama, could highlight the stimulus program.

Overall, the emails released Friday show the White House was in close touch with Solyndra and rooted for the company's success, but they don't provide explicit evidence in support of allegations raised by the Republican lawmakers.

White House spokesman Jay Carney said Friday that politics played no role in the decision-making process, and that emails released by the White House supported that. He added that the process was merit-based and run by career officials at the Energy Department.

"The interest at the White House was in...when that decision would be made, one way or

another, so decisions about scheduling an event for the vice president could be made," Mr. Carney said.



Enlarge Image

Associated Press

A guard outside Solyndra, in Fremont, Calif., blocked a camera on Friday.

The Energy Department says Solyndra ran into trouble unexpectedly when Chinese manufacturers flooded the market with cheaper panels.

In an interview, Mr. Miller said his emails amounted to a "professional courtesy" for the White House representatives he had worked with to plan Mr. Obama's visit to Solyndra in May 2010. "I was communicating with an individual and not expecting it to go beyond that," Mr. Miller said.

Two months after Mr. Obama's visit to Solyndra, the firm brought to the White House's attention a media report questioning the company's finances. In a July 2010 email to several White House officials, Mr. Miller called the report "total crap" and said: "We can assure you we have a path to profitability."

Mr. Nelson, deputy director of the White House office of public engagement, said in an email the report "seems B.S."

Two days later, Mr. Miller sent a separate email about a story in Barron's, saying he was "looking forward to the eventual embarrassment being on the Barron's side, not yours."

Solyndra and its lobbyists also reached out to the White House to raise concerns that the U.S. government was buying solar panels from Chinese makers rather than from U.S. firms.

"[A]pparently there is an issue with the government buying Chinese panels over U.S. manufactured ones," a lobbyist for Solyndra wrote in an email requesting a July 2010 meeting with White House environment adviser Carol Browner.

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