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The Administration's Assault on Climate Change Science

When President Bush rejected the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions, he promised the American people that "my Administration's climate change policy will be science-based."[1] In fact, however, the Bush Administration has repeatedly manipulated scientific committees by suppressing and distorting science in this area.[2] One climate change expert, who resigned in March 2005 from the U.S. Climate Change Science Program, has stated that "[t]he White House so successfully politicized the science program that I decided it was necessary to terminate my relationship with it."[3]

Scientific Information about Global Warming

Political appointees in the Administration have exercised unprecedented influence over the scientific content of government reports on global warming, and the way they have been characterized to the public.

A. U.S. Climate Change Science Program

The Chief of Staff for the White House Council for Environmental Quality, Phillip A. Cooney, a lawyer with no scientific training, reviewed and altered government scientific reports on global warming.[4] Prior to working at the White House, Mr. Cooney was an oil-industry lobbyist at the American Petroleum Institute tasked with the job of fighting tighter restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions.[5] Mr. Cooney's edits systematically weakened the government's conclusions on global warming.

In one example, in an October 2002 draft of a report on global climate change by the U.S. Climate Change Science Program, Mr. Cooney removed a summary of findings by climate researchers that climate change would reduce mountain glaciers and snowpack, because he felt the findings were "speculative."[6] Mr. Cooney consistently undermined conclusions in other draft

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[1] White House, *President's Statement on Climate Change* (July 13, 2001) (online at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/07/20010713-2.html).
[2] This fact sheet is based on the report *Politics and Science in the Bush Administration* by the Minority Staff, House Committee on Government Reform (Aug. 8, 2003).
[3] Rick S. Piltz, "Censorship and Secrecy: Politicizing the U.S. Climate Change Science Program" (June 1, 2005).
[4] *Bush Aide Softened Greenhouse Gas Links to Global Warming*, New York Times (June 8, 2005).
[5] *White House Calls Editing of Climate Files Part of Usual Review*, New York Times (June 9, 2005).
[6] *Id.*

reports by injecting unwarranted uncertainty into affirmative statements (e.g., changing "is" to "may") and by selectively amplifying existing scientific uncertainty (e.g., adding "extremely" to a statement indicating that an attribution of specific climate changes to global warming is difficult).[7]

B. Environmental Protection Agency

In September 2002, EPA removed a section on global warming from an annual report on the state of air pollution.[8] Then, in June 2003, EPA published a "comprehensive" report on the environment without any information on climate change. According to then-EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman, the *Draft Report on the Environment* used "the most sophisticated science ever" and represented "a comprehensive roadmap to ensure that all Americans have cleaner air, purer water and better protected land."[9] However, this report contained no information on global warming. Instead, the document stated, "This report does not attempt to address the complexities of this issue."[10]

Politics, not the complexities of science, led to the deletion of the section on global warming. The *New York Times* reported that when an earlier draft of the report containing a section on global warming was sent to the White House, the President's advisors demanded major revisions.[11] Specifically, the White House opposed mention of research demonstrating sharp increases in global temperature over the past decade compared to the previous millennium. The White House objected to the reference to a National Academy of Sciences report on the human contribution to global warming that the White House itself had requested, and that had been endorsed by President Bush in speeches that year.[12] Administration officials replaced these sections with a reference to a study funded by the American Petroleum Institute questioning climate change evidence.[13]

The White House also sought to replace the scientifically indisputable statement that "[c]limate change has global consequences for human health and the environment" with a statement about the "complexity of the Earth system and the interconnections among its components."[14]

An internal EPA memorandum circulated during the editing process noted that after these changes, the section "no longer accurately represents scientific consensus on climate change."[15] The memo included a discussion of EPA's "options" that stated that by accepting the White

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[7] *Id,*
[8] Jeremy Symons, *How Bush and Co. Obscure the Science*, Washington Post (July 13, 2003).
[9] EPA, *EPA Announces Unprecedented First "Draft Report on the Environment"* (June 23, 2003).
[10] EPA, *Draft Report on the Environment 2003,* 1-11 (online at http://www.epa.gov/indicators/roe/html/roeAirGlo.htm).
[11] *Report by E.P.A. Leaves out Data on Climate Change*, New York Times (June 19, 2003).
[12] Environmental Protection Agency, *Issue Paper: White House Edits to Climate Change Section of EPA's Report on the Environment* (Apr. 29, 2003) (available from the Union of Concerned Scientists, *Scientific Integrity in Policymaking*, 7 (Feb. 18, 2004)).
[13] *Id.*
[14] *Id.*
[15] *Id.*

House changes, "E.P.A. will take responsibility and severe criticism from the science and environmental communities for poorly representing the science."[16]

In the end, EPA officials chose to eliminate the section on global warming entirely. Russell Train, who served as EPA Administrator to Presidents Nixon and Ford, wrote in a letter to the *New York Times*:

> I can state categorically that there never was such White House intrusion into the business of the E.P.A. during my tenure. The E.P.A. was established as an independent agency in the executive branch, and so it should remain. There appears today to be a steady erosion in its independent status. I can appreciate the president's interest in not having discordant voices within his Administration. But the interest of the American people lies in having full disclosure of the facts, particularly when the issue is one with such potentially enormous damage to the long-term health and economic well-being of all of us.[17]

C. National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Dr. James E. Hansen, a climatology expert at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, has objected to pressure by senior officials to minimize the impact of global warming. [18] After giving a presentation on human-caused climate change, Dr. Hansen was told by NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe that he "should not talk about dangerous anthropogenic interference" because the topic was filled with uncertainty.[19] Hansen said of the current political climate: "In my more than three decades in government, I have never seen anything approaching the degree to which information flow from scientists to the public has been screened and controlled as it has now."[20]

Political appointees at NASA have also misrepresented scientific findings on global climate change. In one case, NASA scientists wrote an article summarizing recent findings on global warming. The article was titled, "Cool Antarctica May Warm Rapidly This Century, Study Finds."[21] Prior to publication however, political appointees edited the headline to read: "Study Shows Potential for Antarctic Climate Change."[22]

D. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

In August 2003, National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) climatologists drafted a news release to read: "NOAA reports record and near-record July heat in the West, cooler than

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[16] *Id.*
[17] Russell E. Train, *When Politics Trumps Science* (Letter to the Editor), New York Times (June 21, 2003).
[18] *NASA Expert Criticizes Bush on Global Warming Policy*, New York Times (Oct. 26, 2004).
[19] *Id.*
[20] *Putting Some Heat on Bush, Scientist Inspires Anger, Awe for Challenges on Global Warming*, New York Times (Jan. 19, 2005).
[21] *Bush vs. the Laureates: How Science Became a Partisan Issue*, New York Times (Oct. 19, 2004).
[22] *Id.*

average in the East, global temperature much warmer than average."[23] Political appointees edited the release to read: "NOAA reports cooler, wetter than average in the East, hot in the West."[24]

E. State Department

The State Department pressured the Arctic Council, an international panel with representatives from the United States, Canada, Russia and five other nations, to alter a scientific report on global warming. The report, released in December 2004, found that arctic temperatures have increased rapidly in recent years.[25] During the final drafting stages of the report, the State Department successfully pressured the group to withhold a proposed section of policy recommendations to mitigate the impact on the Arctic.[26] According to members of the Council, recommendations on the reduction of greenhouse gasses were dropped from the report at the request of the State Department.[27]

F. U.S. Department of Agriculture

U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service encountered resistance from the White House's Council of Environmental Quality when it tried to reprint a brochure on ways to reduce agricultural emission of greenhouse gases.[28] More than 300,000 copies of the brochure had previously been distributed. However, in September 2003, the White House objected to the brochure, and the reprinting was canceled.[29] A current government official who is familiar with the case said that "it is not just a case of micromanagement, but really of censorship of government information ... In nearly 15 years of government service, I can't remember ever needing clearance from the White House for such a thing."[30]

International Science Panel

In early 2002, the State Department successfully opposed the re-appointment of a leading U.S. climatologist to the top position on the preeminent international global warming study panel.[31]

Dr. Robert Watson had been chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) since 1996. An internationally respected scientist and recipient of numerous awards and honors, Dr. Watson had been the Director of the Science Division at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and chief scientist at the World Bank. Under his leadership, the IPCC had produced a report predicting an increase of 2.5 to 10.5 degrees Fahrenheit in average global

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[23] *Id.*
[24] *Id.*
[25] *Arctic Council Urges Action on Warming; U.S. Resists Carbon Dioxide Limits*, Washington Post (Nov. 25, 2004).
[26] *Arctic Council shies from recommendations to deal with global warming*, Associated Press (Nov. 24, 2004).
[27] *U.S. Wants No Warming Proposal; Administration Aims to Prevent Arctic Council Suggestions*, Washington Post (Nov. 4, 2004).
[28] Union of Concerned Scientists, *Scientific Integrity in Policymaking*, 8 (Feb. 18, 2004).
[29] *Id.*
[30] *Id.*
[31] *Battle Over IPCC Chair Renews Debate on U.S. Climate Policy*, Science (Apr. 12, 2002).

temperatures by 2100[32] and concluding that "[t]here is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities."[33] These conclusions were affirmed by the National Academy of Sciences.[34]

After the release of the 2001 report, ExxonMobil lobbied the Bush administration for Dr. Watson's ouster. A February 6, 2001, memo sent by ExxonMobil to John Howard of the Council on Environmental Quality at the White House criticized Dr. Watson and asked, "Can Watson be replaced now at the request of the U.S.?"[35] ExxonMobil opposes the regulation of carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to global warming and gives over a million dollars a year to groups that question the existence of global warming.[36]

Subsequently, the State Department opposed Dr. Watson's reelection to head the panel. The Department gave no scientific rationale for this decision. In April 2002, lacking the support of the United States, Dr. Watson lost his position as chair.[37]

One leading researcher, Michael Oppenheimer of Princeton University, commented to *Science*: "It is scandalous ... This is an invasion of narrow political considerations into a scientific process."[38]

Analyses Requested by Congress

EPA has long had the important role of providing technical support to Congress by analyzing proposed legislation upon request. During the Bush Administration, however, EPA has refused to conduct or release analysis of several key pieces of legislation related to greenhouse gases that are opposed by the Administration.

President Bush has proposed the Clear Skies Act, which would reduce emissions of three pollutants from power plants but would not regulate carbon dioxide, a key greenhouse gas. In July 2002, Senator Thomas Carper of Delaware introduced competing legislation that sets tighter emissions limits and includes carbon dioxide.[39] Senator Carper requested that EPA provide a detailed analysis of his legislation, as it had done for Clear Skies, to enable Congress to compare the two approaches.

EPA, however, refused to release its analysis of Senator Carper's bill for months. When the agency finally released some information, it limited the report to the costs of the bill, continuing

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[32] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis, Summary for Policymakers* (2001) (online at http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/wg1/008.htm).
[33] *Id.* at Preface (online at http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/wg1/004.htm).
[34] National Academy of Sciences, Commission on Geosciences, Environment and Resources, *Climate Change Science: An Analysis of Some Key Questions* (2001).
[35] Memo from Randy Randol, ExxonMobil Washington Office, to John Howard, White House Council on Environmental Quality (Feb. 6, 2001) (online at http://www.nrdc.org/media/docs/020403.pdf).
[36] *Exxon Backs Groups That Question Global Warming*, New York Times (May 28, 2003).
[37] *Global Warming Official Out*, Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Apr. 20, 2002).
[38] *Battle over IPCC Chair Renews Debate on U.S. Climate Policy*, Science (Apr. 12, 2002).
[39] S. 3135, 107th Cong. (2002).

to withhold the information on benefits.[40] EPA's complete analysis, which was not released, showed that Senator Carper's legislation would be more effective and only slightly more expensive than the President's Clear Skies Act. Specifically, it projected that Senator Carper's bill would: reduce emissions to levels lower than those projected under the Clear Skies Act, cost only two-tenths of a cent per kilowatt hour more than the President's plan, save 17,800 more lives, and include controls on carbon dioxide.[41]

In response to the accusation that the Administration had sought to conceal the benefits of the Carper legislation, White House Science Adviser John Marburger argued that the analysis was being reviewed at the time it was reported in the *Washington Post*, and that it was eventually released to Senator Carper.[42] This explanation fails to address accounts by EPA scientists, who quote Jeffrey Holmstead, EPA Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation, saying of the Carper Bill analysis, "How can we justify Clear Skies if this gets out?"[43]

In addition, EPA has refused to complete an analysis that could demonstrate the feasibility of controlling greenhouse gas emissions. Senators John McCain and Joseph Lieberman have introduced legislation to establish national mandatory caps on greenhouse gas emissions. The Bush Administration opposes this legislation. In the past, EPA has analyzed numerous proposals for regulation of greenhouse gas emissions, and the Senators specifically requested EPA to analyze the costs and benefits of their bill. However, the Administration blocked the completion of the EPA analysis, which preliminarily found a $1 billion to $2 billion negative impact on the economy, in favor of an Energy Department study, which concluded that the impact would be $106 billion.[44]

Commenting on EPA's refusals, William Ruckelshaus, the first EPA Administrator under President Nixon, told the *New York Times*:

> Whether or not analysis is released is based on at least two factors . . . . Is the analysis flawed? That is a legitimate reason for not releasing it. But if you don't like the outcome that might result from the analysis, that is not a legitimate reason.[45]

On April 14, 2005, Senator Carper placed a hold on the Senate vote to confirm Stephen Johnson to the post of EPA Administrator. Senator Carper requested a commitment from Johnson that the EPA conduct a full analysis of the Senator's emission proposal.[46] On April 21, Johnson wrote to the Senate that the EPA would perform the some additional analyses; however, Johnson's response did not commit to all of the specifics of Sen. Carper's request.[47]

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[40] *EPA Withholds Air Pollution Analysis*, Washington Post (July 1, 2003).
[41] *Id.*
[42] John H. Marbuger III, *Response to the Union of Concerned Scientists' February 2004 Document* (Apr. 2, 2004).
[43] *Critics Say E.P.A. Won't Analyze Clean Air Proposals Conflicting With President's Policies*, New York Times (July 14, 2003)
[44] *New Estimates on Senate Carbon Dioxide Plans*, New York Times (July 30, 2003).
[45] *Critics Say E.P.A. Won't Analyze Clean Air Proposals Conflicting with President's Policies*, New York Times (July 14, 2003).
[46] *White House's EPA Nominee Blocked Again in Senate,* Reuters News (Apr. 14, 2005).
[47] *Johnson Pledges Clean Air Analysis as Frist Pursues Confirmation Vote*, Inside EPA (Apr. 27, 2004).