

April 24, 2008 letter to EPA Administrator Johnson, Chairman Waxman requested that he be prepared to testify regarding the recently released Union of Concerned Scientists Report documenting extensive and widespread political interference with the work of scientists at EPA. The text of the letter follows:

Dear Administrator Johnson:

Today the Union of Concerned Scientists released the results of its survey of nearly 1,600 EPA scientists. The survey's disturbing findings indicate that EPA scientists face significant political interference with their work. I have enclosed the report for your convenience and ask that you be prepared to respond to its findings at May's Oversight Committee hearing.

Almost 1,600 EPA scientists completed the Union of Concerned Scientists survey questionnaire. Over 22% of these scientists reported that "selective or incomplete use of data to justify a specific regulatory outcome" occurred "frequently" or "occasionally" at EPA. 94 EPA scientists reported being frequently or occasionally "directed to inappropriately exclude or alter technical information from an EPA scientific document." Nearly 200 EPA scientists said that they have frequently or occasionally been in "situations in which scientists have actively objected to, resigned from or removed themselves from a project because of pressure to change scientific findings."

Political appointees at EPA and other agencies appear to be a major source of political interference. Over 500 EPA scientists knew of "many" or "some" cases "where EPA political appointees had inappropriately involved themselves in scientific decisions." Even more EPA scientists knew of "many" or "some" cases "where political appointees from other federal agencies," including the White House, "had inappropriately involved themselves in decisions." In open-ended essay responses, "nearly a hundred EPA scientists identified the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as a primary culprit." These essays included numerous comments like "OMB should stop interfering in EPA Science" and "[t]he unprecedented and unwarranted influence of the EPA's scientific work and findings by the White House and OMB must end."

Overall, 889 EPA scientists said they "personally experienced at least one incident of political interference during the past five years." Based on the survey, there may have been as many as 2,604 incidents of political interference at EPA during that period of time.

When asked about the role of science in EPA decisionmaking, the scientists provided some troubling responses. Nearly half of the scientists

said that EPA determinations “occasionally, seldom, or never make use of the best judgment of its scientific staff.” Over 550 scientists reported that the agency “occasionally, seldom, or never heeds advice from independent scientific advisory committees.”

These survey results suggest a pattern of ignoring and manipulating science in EPA’s decisionmaking. At May’s hearing, the Committee will examine one apparent example of this disturbing trend: EPA’s recent revision of the national air quality standards for ozone. You should also expect members of the Committee to ask about these survey results and other evidence of political interference with science at EPA.

Sincerely,

Henry A. Waxman  
Chairman  
Committee on Oversight and  
Government Reform