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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

RICHARD M. RUSSELL, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
MARY FRANCES REPKO, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

December 3, 2018

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Acting Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Acting Administrator Wheeler:

I write to express my grave concerns regarding the recent public comments made by you and your agency with respect to the release of the Fourth National Climate Assessment. These comments appear to run afoul of the commitment you made to me during your confirmation hearing, when you committed not to distort climate science studies, saying, “[m]y goal would be to not distort any scientific or economic analysis.”¹

On the day after Thanksgiving, thirteen federal agencies led by NOAA released the Fourth National Climate Assessment. This nearly 1,700-page, congressionally-mandated report highlighted the devastating impacts that climate change will have over the next eighty years if we do not change course now. The report was a dire warning to our nation and our planet, a warning that the world’s leaders are today attempting to heed as the 24th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change begins this week.

The Fourth National Climate Assessment took three years to develop and write. It was written with input from more than 300 federal experts – some of which are EPA employees – as well as non-federal experts who volunteered their time. The scientific report was finalized following an extensive public outreach and interagency review process, and its conclusions are important to every person living on this planet.

Since the report was released, comments made by you and other Trump Administration officials have sought to undermine the findings of the report. For example, on November 26, 2018, President Trump stated “I don’t believe it” when asked about the report, adding that “we’re at the cleanest we’ve ever been.”² The following day, White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders stated at the White House press conference that “We think that this is the most extreme

¹ https://www.eenews.net/assets/2017/11/28/document_pm_06.pdf

² <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/26/politics/donald-trump-climate-change/index.html>

version and it's not based on facts." She also said that "[I]t's not data-driven" and that it "contradicts long established trends."³

At a *Washington Post* event held on November 28, 2018, you stated that "The drafting of this report was drafted at the direction of the Obama administration"...and "[G]oing forward, I think we need to take a look at the modeling that used for the next assessment" and "I don't know this for a fact — I wouldn't be surprised if the Obama administration told the report's authors to take a look at the worst case scenario for this report."⁴ The EPA then doubled down on these comments the next day, by releasing a statement⁵ that purported to validate your remarks, citing an article⁶ issued by *The Daily Caller*, a publication with a long history of issuing false statements about climate change.⁷ This article greatly mischaracterized the scope of the climate report by falsely asserting that Obama Administration officials directed it to focus on the 'worst-case' scenario.

As you must certainly know, the National Climate Assessment is not developed at the direction of any one Administration, but was directed by Congress through the Global Change Research Act of 1990, which passed the United States Senate unanimously and was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush. This law requires, every four years, a report that, "analyzes the effects of global change on the natural environment, agriculture, energy production and use, land and water resources, transportation, human health and welfare, human social systems, and biological diversity" and "analyzes current trends in global change, both human-induced and natural, and projects major trends for the subsequent 25 to 100 years."⁸ The memo mischaracterized by EPA and *The Daily Caller* clearly states that the Fourth National Climate Assessment should use scenarios and science that are consistent with previous reports.⁹

If the United States continues to ignore the dangers of climate change, the costs for all Americans will be devastating. This isn't an alarmist prediction. It doesn't come from some left-leaning organization, and it doesn't come from talk radio. It comes directly from our nation's leading scientists. We may not all agree about what to do to address these dire warnings, but it disturbs me greatly that counter to the commitment you made to me during your confirmation hearing, you seem to be actively working to undermine and distort the scientific evidence itself.

So that I can understand the basis for EPA's views and involvement in shaping the Trump Administration's response to its own report, I ask that you provide me with the following materials, no later than January 15, 2019:

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/28/politics/climate-fact-check/index.html>

⁴ <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/11/28/epa-trump-next-climate-study-992872>

⁵ <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/fact-check-obama-administration-pushed-worst-case-scenario-climate-assessment>

⁶ <https://dailycaller.com/2018/11/28/epa-andrew-wheeler-obama-climate-report/>

⁷ <https://dailycaller.com/2018/03/23/deceptive-language-ruins-earth-hour/>

⁸ Pub.L. 101-606

⁹ https://scenarios.globalchange.gov/sites/default/files/External%20memo%20NCA4%20scenarios%20framing_20150506.pdf

1. Copies of all briefing materials prepared for you or other Trump Administration EPA political officials related to the preparation and release of the Fourth National Climate Assessment, including but not limited to the May 2, 2018 briefing for the Office of Air and Radiation whose invited participants included Bill Wehrum and David Harlow, the May 14, 2018 briefing for the Office of Water whose invited participants included Lee Forsgren and Owen McDonough, and the May 29, 2018 briefing for the Office of Research and Development whose invited participants included Richard Yamada.
2. Copies of all briefing or materials prepared by EPA that were sent to any other entity within the Trump Administration related to the preparation or release of the Fourth National Climate Assessment.
3. Copies of all documents, including emails, white papers, memos, briefing slides, meeting minutes, drafts of press remarks or talking points, or other materials related to the release of the Fourth National Climate Assessment, including documents related to the decision to release the report the day after Thanksgiving.
4. Copies of all documents, including emails, white papers, memos, briefing slides, meeting minutes, drafts of press remarks or talking points, or other materials related to your appearance at the November 28, 2018 *Washington Post* event or the EPA press release the following day.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter. If you or your staff have questions about this letter or the requests, please contact me directly or have your staff contact Laura Gillam or Michal Freedhoff of the Environment and Public Works Committee staff. I look forward to your timely response.

With best personal regards, I am,

Sincerely yours,



Tom Carper
Ranking Member