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House of Representatives

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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Hearing on Political Interference with Science: Global Warming, Part II
March 19, 2007

Today, the Committee continues its investigation into whether the nonpartisan work of climate change scientists was distorted by political interference from the Bush Administration.

Since our first hearing on January 30, we have received over eight boxes of documents from the White House Council on Environmental Quality. The document production is not yet complete. But some of the information the Committee has already obtained is disturbing. It suggests there may have been a concerted effort directed by the White House to mislead the public about the dangers of global climate change.

It is too early in this investigation to draw firm conclusions about the White House's conduct. But today's hearing will help us learn more about those efforts and provide guidance on whether further investigation is warranted.

There is a saying in Washington that "personnel is policy." The White House appointed an oil industry lobbyist — not a scientist or climate change expert — as chief of staff at the Council on Environmental Quality. We will hear from that former lobbyist, Phil Cooney, today. The documents we have received indicate he was able to exert tremendous influence on the direction of federal climate change policy and science.

One of the key responsibilities given to Mr. Cooney and his staff at CEQ was the review of government publications about climate change. Mr. Cooney and his staff made hundreds of separate edits to the government's "strategic plan" for climate change research. These changes injected doubt in place of certainty, minimized the dangers of climate change, and diminished the human role in causing the planet to warm.

Other key government reports — including an EPA report on the environment and an annual report to Congress on the changing planet — were subject to similar edits and distortions.

In preparation for this hearing, the majority staff prepared a memorandum for members analyzing the changes made by Mr. Cooney and his staff to these government climate change

reports. I ask that this memorandum and the CEQ documents it cites be made part of this hearing record. I also ask that Mr. Cooney's deposition be made part of the hearing record.

Another facet of the White House campaign involved controlling what federal scientists could say to the public and the media about their work. NASA scientist James Hansen is one of the nation's most esteemed experts on climate change. George Deutsch is a young and inexperienced former NASA public affairs officer who was tasked with managing the public statements of Dr. Hansen and other NASA scientists. Today, we will hear from both of them about their experiences.

There is even evidence in the documents we have obtained that the White House edited an op-ed written by former EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman to ensure that it followed the White House line about climate change.

Our goal in this investigation is to understand what role the White House actually played. It would be a serious abuse if senior White House officials deliberately tried to defuse calls for action by ensuring that the public heard a distorted message about the risks of climate change.

In addressing climate change, science should drive policy. The public and Congress need access to the best possible science to inform the policy debate about how to protect the planet from irreversible changes.

If the Administration turned this principle upside down with raw political pressure, it put our country on a dangerous course. Today's hearing should bring us closer to understanding whether that is suspicion or fact.

I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses and thank them for their cooperation.