

Dingell on the "Commodity Markets Transparency and Accountability Act"

Washington, D.C. — Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), the Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, delivered the following statement regarding H.R. 6604, the "Commodity Markets Transparency and Accountability Act," which passed the House of Representatives 283 to 133.

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing entitled, "Science Under Siege: Scientific Integrity at the Environmental Protection Agency," September 18, 2008

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this very important hearing.

Scientific integrity is an essential ingredient of nearly every decision the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) makes. Unfortunately, there is a substantial question as to whether that is always the case under the current Administration.

There is growing evidence that Congress, State and local governments, the public, and even other countries cannot rely on EPA for honest science.

The landmark survey of EPA scientists conducted by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) confirms what many had feared—the Bush Administration's political interference with EPA scientists is pervasive and frequent.

The UCS survey found that more than 500 EPA scientists knew of "many or some" cases where EPA political appointees had interfered with scientific decisions.

Nearly 100 EPA scientists identified the White House Office of Management and Budget as the primary source of external interference.

And more than 500 scientists said they feared retaliation for speaking candidly about EPA's scientific work.

Clearly, we are not talking about an isolated incident.

The testimony we will hear today exposes a broad pattern of political meddling by the Bush Administration, directed at EPA scientists and science.

A prime example is the Administration's recent changes to the Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) process, under which chemicals are evaluated to determine the extent to which they may be hazardous to human health.

For 20 years, government agencies both here and abroad have relied on IRIS for scientifically reliable information on the human health effects of hundreds of widely used chemicals. Drinking water standards and workplace exposure standards are based on the scientific data contained in the IRIS database.

Undeterred by the success of the IRIS system, however, the Bush Administration has changed the IRIS process to all but halt the addition of new chemicals to the database. What was once a careful scientific process managed by EPA scientists, has now become a cumbersome, bureaucratic, political exercise run by OMB.

Under this new system, the two largest polluters in the United States—the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy—are permitted to provide secret comments to OMB, which then has the final say on what goes into the IRIS system. Even EPA is not permitted to see these comments.

And, because all of this is now done in secrecy, it is not entirely clear who else may have a hand in the process.

In short, what was once a process marked by transparency, candor, and credibility, is now marked by secrecy, manipulation, and influence.

Mr. Chairman, I particularly want to welcome to this hearing Dr. Deborah Rice, Chief Toxicologist for the State of Maine. Dr. Rice's removal from an IRIS peer review panel at the request of the chemical industry because she had testified before the Maine legislature was disgraceful.

I look forward to hearing from EPA management about the specific steps they are taking to rectify these problems and to protect scientific integrity at the agency.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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