

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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September 8, 2017

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington DC 20004

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

We are writing to request additional information in response to troubling reports of the possible politicization of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant program at the expense of science, public health, and the environment. These deeply concerning actions are the latest in a series which suggest an apparent pattern and organized effort within the Trump Administration to use federal resources to advance partisan legislation or personal vendettas.¹

On July 28, the Senate rejected Republican legislation which would have advanced efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act.² Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska was one of three Republican senators to cast a vote against the legislation.³ The same day, the EPA reportedly decided to put a temporary hold on all grant awards to the state of Alaska.⁴ According to a recent report by the *Washington Post*,¹

¹ Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, to Department of the Interior and the U.S. Government Accountability Office (July 27, 2017); Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, to U.S. Government Accountability Office (July 26, 2017).

² *How Each Senator Voted on Obamacare Repeal Proposals*, New York Times (July 28, 2017).

³ *Then and Now: Sen. Murkowski's Health Care Repeal Vote*, Fairbanks Daily News-Miner (August 9, 2017).

⁴ *EPA Now Requires Political Aide's Sign-off for Agency Awards, Grant Applications*, Washington Post (September 4, 2017).

[O]n the same day that Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska joined with two other Republicans in voting down a GOP health-care bill, EPA staffers were instructed without any explanation to halt all grants to the regional office that covers Alaska, Washington, Oregon and Idaho. That hold was quickly narrowed just to Alaska and remained in place for nearly two weeks.⁵

The temporary hold on grants to Alaska reportedly slowed the award of grants totaling more than \$10 million to tribes and to the state of Alaska's Department of Conservation.⁶

Grants awarded by the EPA are not political favors from the Trump Administration, but instead are critically important funding used by state and local governments, tribes, and other organizations to protect human health and the environment. Reports that the Trump Administration decided to withhold federal environmental grants from the state of Alaska on the same day that Senator Murkowski voted against a major Republican health care bill suggests that the Trump Administration is politicizing the process of awarding taxpayer-financed grants.

These troubling events follow earlier reports that EPA, in an apparently unprecedented action, placed a political appointee in the EPA Office of Public Affairs in charge of vetting hundreds of millions of dollars in grants EPA awards each year.⁷

Given this Committee's longstanding interest in ensuring that the EPA and states are able to protect human health and the environment free from undue political influence, we request your attention to the following:

1. Did President Trump or any other administration official at any time request that EPA halt funding to Alaska? Please provide copies of all electronic communications and phone records between yourself and any EPA leadership and White House personnel on Friday, July 28.
2. Please provide all communications during your tenure at EPA to date instructing EPA staff to halt, slow, or otherwise alter any grants to EPA's region 10 office or the states of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, or Idaho. Please include copies of all electronic communications related to these instructions. Where verbal instructions were given, please provide a description of the instruction including actions requested, the date of the instruction, the title and name of the EPA official giving the instruction, and a list including the title and name of all EPA staff to whom the instructions were given.
3. Please provide a list of grants to the EPA region 10 office, or any grant recipients in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho which were halted, slowed, or otherwise altered during the months of July, August, and September 2017. For each grant, please provide

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ See note 4.

the name and location of the recipient, the grant amount, and the reason for stopping or slowing the award of federal funds.

4. Please confirm the accuracy of all other allegations in the *Post* report.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter. Please provide your response no later than September 22, 2017. If you or members of your staff have further questions, please contact Jon Monger on the Democratic Committee staff at (202) 225-3641.

Sincerely,


Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member


Diana DeGette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations


Kathy Castor
Vice Ranking Member


Paul D. Tonko
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment

Cc: The Honorable Greg Walden
The Honorable Joe Barton
The Honorable Tim Murphy
The Honorable John Shimkus