

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

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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August 30, 2017

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

We write with significant concerns regarding the lack of transparency at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These concerns were underscored in two recent *New York Times* reports, “Scott Pruitt is Carrying Out His E.P.A. Agenda in Secret, Critics Say”¹ and “Counseled by Industry, Not Staff, E.P.A. Chief Is Off to a Blazing Start.”²

According to these reports, EPA’s own career staff and scientists with decades of experience in science and environmental law have been cut out of EPA’s regulatory process to the detriment of unbiased scientific expertise.³ Simultaneously, as noted in earlier Committee inquiries, you removed qualified experts from EPA’s Board of Scientific Counselors, depriving EPA of critical scientific and technical expertise needed to support the Agency’s mission to protect human health and the environment.⁴ EPA’s reported reliance on industry representatives instead of qualified scientific experts suggests a continued and extreme disregard for scientific integrity.

Additionally, we are troubled by reports that the Agency continues to operate with complete disregard for transparency by discontinuing the long-standing practice of posting the

¹ *Scott Pruitt is Carrying Out His E.P.A. Agenda in Secret, Critics Say*, New York Times (Aug. 11, 2017).

² *Counseled by Industry, Not Staff, E.P.A. Chief Is Off to a Blazing Start*, New York Times (July 1, 2017).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Letter from Reps. Frank Pallone, Jr., Diana DeGette, Eddie Bernice Johnson, Donald Beyer, Paul Tonko, and Suzanne Bonamici to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt (May 18, 2017).

calendars of Agency leadership online, taking down Agency websites, and halting certain data collections from polluters.⁵

The Agency has even reportedly instituted extreme restrictions on employee movement within the building, locking doors at headquarters and requiring escorts for employees.⁶ In certain meetings, employees are reportedly told not to take notes and to not carry their cellular telephones.⁷ Taken together, these actions suggest a troubling pattern of secrecy and distrust at EPA, which serves to undermine the agency's mission of protecting human health and the environment.

We request you confirm the accuracy of these reports, and respond to the following:

1. According to *The New York Times*, the Agency is issuing regulations “largely without the input of the 15,000 career employees at the agency.”⁸ Reports also indicate your “main source of counsel on industry regulations appears to be the industries [you] regulate” and you have “outsourced crucial work to a network of lawyers, lobbyists and other allies, especially Republican state attorneys general.”⁹ Within EPA, you reportedly “rel[y] on the counsel of a small network of political appointees, including a number of former lobbyists and senior industry officials.”¹⁰ Please confirm the accuracy of these allegations and explain how agency processes ensure that the expertise of EPA career employees informs the agency's decisions, including key regulatory actions.
2. According to *The New York Times*, EPA has even restricted access of EPA employees to certain parts of the Agency's headquarters, as “[d]oors to the floor are now frequently locked, and employees have to have an escort to gain entrance.”¹¹ Please confirm the accuracy of these allegations.
3. News reports further indicate “employees say they are also told to leave behind their cellphones when they meet with Mr. Pruitt, and are sometimes told not to take notes.”¹² Please confirm the accuracy of these allegations.

⁵ See note 1.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ See note 2.

¹⁰ *Id.*

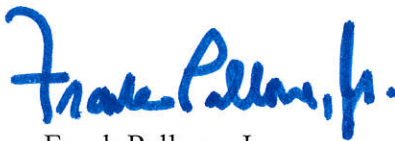
¹¹ See note 1.

¹² *Id.*

4. EPA has also reportedly curtailed public access to Agency information, halting data collection of oil and gas company emissions and closing over 1,900 EPA webpages.¹³ Please confirm the accuracy of these allegations.
5. EPA has also ended long-standing Agency practice of publicly posting appointments calendars for the Administrator and top EPA staff.¹⁴ Please confirm the accuracy of this allegation.

We appreciate your prompt attention to these concerns. We respectfully request a response by no later than Wednesday, September 13, 2017. Should you have any questions, please contact Jon Monger with Democratic Committee staff at (202) 225-3641.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member



Diana DeGette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations



Paul D. Tonko
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment

Cc: The Honorable Greg Walden
Chairman, House Energy and Commerce Committee

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*