

Bush aide who doctored global warming documents joins ExxonMobil

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A Bush aide who reportedly altered government climate reports to favor the interests of the oil industry has resigned from the administration to take a job at ExxonMobil, the world's largest energy company and most fervent opponent of carbon emissions regulations. For the aide, Philip Cooney, the move completes a cycle in which he has served the interests of the oil giants both in and out of government.

The *New York Times* reported June 8 that, during his tenure as chief of staff for the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), Cooney repeatedly altered government scientific reports to deemphasize the link between carbon emissions and global warming, and cast doubt on the science of climate change.

The newspaper obtained the internal government documents from the Government Accountability Project, which is representing Rick Piltz, a former associate at the federal Climate Change Science Program that coordinates government research on global warming and related issues. Piltz's office issued the documents that were later altered by Cooney.

One example of Cooney's changes cited by the *Times* comes from an October 2002 draft entitled "Our Changing Planet." The draft originally read, "Many scientific observations indicate that the Earth is undergoing a period of relatively rapid change." This was modified to read, "Many scientific observations point to the conclusion that the Earth may be undergoing a period of relatively rapid change."

Many of the changes were of a similar character—subtle rewordings that cast greater doubt on the conclusiveness of scientific understandings of climate change. On one occasion, he deleted a paragraph describing projected effects of global warming on glacial melting, on the grounds that the paragraph strayed "into speculative musings/findings."

Cooney has no scientific training. Before taking the post of chief of staff at the CEQ, he worked as a lawyer and lobbyist for the American Petroleum Institute, the main oil industry lobbying group, which is heavily funded by Exxon. The API has worked consistently to promote doubts about the validity of climate change research and has opposed legislation that would require the energy industry to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

This is not the first exposure of the CEQ's efforts to tone down government reports on climate change. In June 2003, the

council modified an Environmental Protection Agency report on the environment, excising parts of a long section on global warming. The original draft stated, "Climate change has global consequences for human health and the environment." This was changed to say that climate change "may have potentially profound consequences," but that "the complexity of the earth system ... makes it a scientific challenge to document change."

The CEQ demanded that the EPA remove a reference to a National Academy of Science review confirming that climate change is caused by human activity, in particular the production of carbon dioxide through the burning of fossil fuels. It also had the EPA add a reference to a discredited study funded in part by the API that discounted the evidence of climate change.

Commenting on the latest revelations, Piltz wrote in a memorandum to top government officials responsible for climate change policy, "I have not seen a situation like the one that has developed under this administration during the past four years, in which politicization by the White House has fed back directly into the science program in such a way as to undermine the credibility and integrity of the program." A senior EPA scientist told the *Times* that the administration's direct interference on scientific issues "has somewhat of a chilling effect and has created a sense of frustration" among scientists.

Perhaps more than any other energy company, Exxon—by some measures the most valuable US company—has exerted direct influence on American policy. Vice President Dick Cheney reportedly met with the company's head, Lee Raymond, within weeks of Cheney's inauguration. Exxon also featured prominently in the energy task force discussions headed by Cheney in 2001, during which the Bush administration's energy policy was planned and, reportedly, maps of Iraqi oilfields were examined. Records of these discussions remain secret after a federal appeals court in May dismissed a lawsuit seeking their release.

According to a June 8 article in the British *Guardian*, Exxon was particularly active in urging the administration to oppose the Kyoto protocol on global warming, a relatively mild international agreement that sets out some standards for carbon dioxide emissions reductions. The US decided to withdraw from the protocol in the spring of 2001, one of the Bush

administration's first policy decisions.

The *Guardian* cites US Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky's briefing paper for her meeting with the Global Climate Coalition, an industry organization dominated by Exxon and other energy giants. The paper, one of several documents obtained by Greenpeace through a Freedom of Information Act request, states, "Potus [President of the United States] rejected Kyoto in part based on input from you [the GCC]." Dobriansky was further briefed to the effect that the administration considered Exxon "among the companies most actively and prominently opposed to binding approaches to cut greenhouse gas emissions."

According to the *Guardian*, "Other papers suggest that Ms. Dobriansky should sound out Exxon executives and other anti-Kyoto business groups on potential alternatives to Kyoto."

Recent reports demonstrate that the Bush administration continues an active policy aimed at scuttling any international agreements or documents that address global warming, including ongoing discussions among the eight major industrialized countries on methods to confront climate change. Citing documents it obtained relating to these discussions, the *Washington Post* reported June 17: "Under US pressure, negotiators in the past month have agreed to delete language that would detail how rising temperatures are affecting the globe, set ambitious targets to cut carbon dioxide emissions and set stricter environmental standards for World Bank-funded power projects."

According to the *Post*, the US pressured the other countries to delete a section pointing to "increasingly compelling evidence of climate change" and warning that unless "urgent action is taken, there will be a growing risk of adverse effects on economic development, human health and the natural environment, and of irreversible long-term changes to our climate and oceans." In its place was inserted the sentence: "Climate change is a serious long term challenge that has the potential to affect every part of the globe."

The attempt by the Bush administration and the energy giants to cast doubt on the reality of global warming contrasts sharply with the scientific consensus that has emerged over the past several years. This consensus has concluded that not only is human-caused global warming taking place, but it is having a serious and potentially catastrophic effect on the environment.

Earlier this year, 200 of the world's leading climate scientists meeting in Britain issued an urgent warning that "the point of no return" for climate change could be reached within a decade. The scientists reported that carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere must be kept below 400 parts per million if global warming is to be contained. The average concentration already exceeds 370 ppm and is increasing rapidly.

The year 2004 was the fourth warmest year on record, following 1998, 2002 and 2003, which were the first, second and third warmest years respectively. A study published by the journal *Nature* in February found that, based upon indirect

temperature records found in tree rings and other natural phenomena, the global warming trend since 1990 has not been matched for at least 2,000 years.

In January 2005, Rajendra Pachauri, the chairman of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which comprises more than 2,000 of the world's scientific experts on global warming, warned, "We are risking the ability of the human race to survive."

The Bush administration's attempt to undermine the science of global warming is only one of many examples of the government's contempt for science when it conflicts with the interests of big business and the dogma of the administration's Christian fundamentalist base. A report from the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) in March 2004 pointed to "a well-established pattern of suppression and distortion of scientific findings by high-ranking Bush administration political appointees across numerous federal agencies."

A survey conducted by the UCS, released in February 2005, found that more than 200 scientists employed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service said they had been directed to change their findings in a way that would reduce environmental protections.

The service Cooney has rendered the oil industry, both in and out of public office, is only one example of the extremely close ties between the government and big business.

A June 17 *New York Times* editorial points to three other examples of the so-called revolving door: William Myers III, who served as a lobbyist for the mining and cattle industries before becoming a top lawyer in the Interior Department and now a nominee for a federal appeals court that oversees Western states; Mark Rey, a lobbyist for the logging industry who is now undersecretary for natural resources and the environment in the Agriculture Department; and Robert McCallum, a former lawyer for a firm that did business with RJ Reynolds, who, as associate attorney general, played a major role in undermining the government's own case against the tobacco industry earlier this month.

Another example is that of Larisa Dobiansky, the sister of Paula Dobriansky, the under secretary for global affairs cited above. Larisa currently works at the Energy Department as the deputy assistant secretary for national energy policy. Before this she worked on climate change for ExxonMobil as part of the law firm, Akin Gump.

At no time in American history has there been a government so openly composed of the direct representatives of big business.



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