

US: White House suppressed climate change testimony

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A former official with the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has alleged that Vice President Dick Cheney intervened to alter testimony to Congress about the potential health and safety dangers posed by greenhouse gases.

In a letter to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, former Bush administration climate advisor Jason Burnett alleged that the White House and Cheney's office intervened to edit the testimony of Dr. Julie Gerberding, head of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who appeared before Congress last October.

In her testimony Gerberding told of the serious threats to health and safety posed by climate change, including severe weather events, health issues from air pollution, scarcity of food and water and the spread of water-borne diseases.

Burnett, one of the few Democratic appointees in the Bush administration, resigned his post in June citing differences with the White House over its decision to prevent the state of California from setting limits on greenhouse gas emissions by motor vehicles.

Gerberding's testimony was a response by the EPA to the 2007 Supreme Court ruling in *Massachusetts v. EPA* requiring the agency to decide if greenhouse gases posed a health risk and, if so, issue appropriate regulations. In a rebuke to the White House, the court majority stipulated that the EPA make its decision based on scientific evidence of potential harm to public health and welfare, not policy preferences.

A finding by the EPA that greenhouse gases posed a health risk would, under terms of the Clean Air Act, require the agency to set guidelines regulating greenhouse gas emissions by polluters, something bitterly opposed by the Bush administration. The White House has therefore done everything in its power to

prevent testimony regarding the health and environmental hazards posed by greenhouse gases going on the public record.

In the face of this stonewalling, environmental groups along with 17 states and several major cities filed a lawsuit earlier this year against the EPA seeking to force it to respond to the Supreme Court ruling. However, to this date the EPA has issued no official findings.

According to Burnett, officials with the White House Council on Environmental Quality and Cheney's office intervened to delete some six pages of Dr. Gerberding's testimony that dealt with human health concerns related to climate change. Burnett said that he received a letter asking him to remove from the testimony "any discussion of the human health consequences of climate change." He said he refused to go along with the request because the testimony was "fundamentally accurate." In any event, the offending passages did not show up in the final draft.

On June 25, the *New York Times* reported that the White House had refused to open an email sent by Burnett last December containing a document stating that greenhouse gases are pollutants that must be controlled. Bush administration officials demanded that he retract his finding and send an email saying the document had been sent in error. In his letter to the Senate committee, Burnett wrote that he could not comply because it was not true.

Burnett also alleged the White House and Cheney's office attempted to edit the testimony of EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson regarding California's request to set tougher emissions standards to remove any reference to greenhouse gases harming the environment. Congressional Democrats have charged the White House with suppressing documents related to

that discussion. A decision by the EPA to allow California to impose regulations on auto emissions—a prime source of greenhouse gases—that are tighter than federal standards would have permitted other states to do the same.

It is no secret that the policies of the Bush administration on global warming have been largely shaped by the interests of the oil, gas and coal monopolies. The latest revelations add to a long record of White House attempts to suppress scientific evidence related to climate change.

US government scientists have reported numerous attempts by the White House to prevent them from publicizing findings related to the threat posed by global warming. Bush administration officials have intervened to edit scientific reports to downplay references to the human contribution to climate change. The Bush administration has further sought to suppress information on global warming by slashing funding for Earth Science Research and Analysis.

At this week's G8 summit in Japan the Bush administration opposed setting any near-term commitments by the United States and other industrial nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Prominent scientists warn that failure to take immediate steps to limit carbon dioxide emissions could lead to irreversible climate changes.

Burnett made his letter public in a joint press conference Tuesday with California Senator Barbara Boxer, a Democrat from California. The Democratic Party is seeking to make election year capital out of the Bush administration's refusal to take action on limiting carbon dioxide emissions and the suppression of climate change data. However, this is largely posturing. The Democratic-controlled Congress has proved incapable of passing any legislation seriously dealing with the question of global warming because it is just as beholden to the interests of the energy corporations as Bush and the Republicans.

The latest revelations of the suppression of information related to climate change come as the melting of polar ice offers evidence that global warming is proceeding at faster rate than predicted. Scientists say there is a possibility that North Pole ice may entirely melt this summer for the first time in recorded history. Less sea ice means an increase in the rate at which the oceans absorb heat, which could in

turn further accelerate the pace of climate change.



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