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Submitted via E-Mail to [grifo.francesca@epa.gov](mailto:grifo.francesca@epa.gov)

May 5, 2017

**Re: OIG Hotline No. 2017-0182, Supplemental Information**

Dear Dr. Grifo:

We are writing to supplement our previous request for an investigation based on new information.

On the eve of the People's Climate March, which drew many thousands of people to Washington, DC to seek stronger action on climate change, the Environmental Protection Agency announced that it was "updating" its web pages that had formerly explained the causes of global warming to "reflect the approach of new leadership."<sup>1</sup>

The web pages that no longer appear on EPA's website<sup>2</sup> include the very pages that we cited in our March 14, 2017 letter seeking an investigation of Administrator Pruitt. These pages explain that carbon dioxide is a primary contributor to climate change, contradicting Administrator's Pruitt's public statements at the heart of our complaint. The removal of these webpages is an alarming development that underscores the importance of your investigation and the need for corrective action. It suggests that instead of correcting Administrator Pruitt's false version of the state of climate science, the Agency is instead conforming its website to reflect the Administrator's "alternative facts."

The removal of sources of information about climate change that have existed on the EPA website for decades will only further confuse the public and policymakers as to the scientific consensus on climate

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<sup>1</sup> *EPA Kicks Off Website Updates* (Apr. 28, 2017), <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-kicks-website-updates>.

<sup>2</sup> The web pages are archived on a page that alerts readers that it is "not the current EPA website." See [https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climatechange\\_.html](https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climatechange_.html). Not all the tools within the pages that were archived are maintained for public use. For example, the AVERT tool, which allowed users to calculate how much carbon dioxide could be avoided through various policy changes is no longer available.

change. As several petitions to reconsider EPA's Endangerment Finding are pending before the Agency, the suppression of scientific consensus on this matter has grave policy implications.

Scientific facts cannot be erased or revised to "reflect the approach" of new political appointees. The agency's Scientific Integrity Policy is clear on this point.<sup>3</sup> The move to revise portions of the agency's website that are merely reporting *facts*, not policy, is the next step in the erosion of scientific integrity at the agency that began with Administrator Pruitt's misinformation on the relationship between carbon dioxide and global warming. EPA staff told the Washington Post, "[W]e can't have information which contradicts the actions we have taken in the last two months [on the website.]"<sup>4</sup> This attempt to bend facts to political will cannot be normalized. It is unacceptable behavior for the leadership of any administrative agency – and especially for one that prides itself on science-based decisionmaking.

It is not only Sierra Club that is alarmed by this development. The public, the media, and EPA's own staff recognize the move to revise the climate change website as politicization and suppression of science. The Washington Post noted that the language on the site had been used to challenge Administrator Pruitt's statements on CNBC,<sup>5</sup> and there were further reports that, "[a]ccording to veteran EPA employees . . . the revisions seem to be aimed at justifying the Trump administration's drastic rollback of Obama-era climate change policies. . . 'I think we are feeling whipsawed and outraged on behalf of the American people, who rely on us for unbiased scientific information and data,' one EPA staffer said. 'This hiding of and, going forward, refusal to update vital scientific data is completely unprecedented and counter to everything a democracy stands for and does.'"<sup>6</sup> Thus, it is clear that this action has already undermined the scientific integrity of the agency.

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<sup>3</sup> See U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Scientific Integrity Policy (2012) (hereinafter "Policy"), [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-02/documents/scientific\\_integrity\\_policy\\_2012.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-02/documents/scientific_integrity_policy_2012.pdf). The Policy states that it "[f]acilitates the free flow of scientific information" (p. 4); that "policy makers shall not knowingly misrepresent, exaggerate, or downplay areas of scientific uncertainty associated with policy decisions" (p. 5); that the Policy "is intended to outline the Agency's expectations for developing and communicating scientific information to the public, to the scientific community, to Congress, and to the news media by further providing for and *protecting the EPA's longstanding commitment to the timely and unfiltered dissemination of its scientific information – uncompromised by political or other interference.*" (p. 5); that "[t]he Agency's scientists and managers are expected to: Represent Agency scientific activities clearly, accurately, honestly, objectively, thoroughly, without political or other interference" (p. 6); and that "[u]nder no circumstances should the public affairs staff attempt to alter or change scientific findings or results. The role of the public affairs officer is to ensure that the science is plainly and clearly communicated for the intended audience in a timely fashion." (p. 7).

<sup>4</sup> Chris Mooney & Juliet Eilperin, THE WASHINGTON POST, *EPA Website Removes Climate Science Site from Public View After Two Decades* (Apr. 29, 2017), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/04/28/epa-website-removes-climate-science-site-from-public-view-after-two-decades/?utm\\_term=.55fda09f8e4e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/04/28/epa-website-removes-climate-science-site-from-public-view-after-two-decades/?utm_term=.55fda09f8e4e).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Freeman, *Trump's big EPA website changes reach 'whole new level of willful ignorance'*, May 2, 2017, <http://mashable.com/2017/05/02/epa-climate-change-website-changes-willful-ignorance/#280YtgVTbiq7>.

We urge you to use your oversight authority to stem the loss of scientific integrity at the agency. Rather than suppressing the scientific data that has long been hosted on the EPA's website, the agency should maintain this public resource.<sup>7</sup> That it clearly contradicts Administrator Pruitt's statements should lead the Administrator to correct himself, not to take down the website.

To resolve our concerns, as set forth in this letter and our letter of March 14, 2017, we respectfully request that the Office of the Science Advisor, or, as originally requested, the Office of the Inspector General, take the following actions:

- (1) Advise Administrator Pruitt to publicly correct his statements regarding the relationship between carbon dioxide and global warming so that they are consistent with the broad scientific consensus on climate change (documented in our March 14, 2017 letter), EPA's own evaluation of that science as described in the removed websites, and as exhaustively set forth in the Endangerment Finding, which reflects EPA's official position.
- (2) In keeping with the Agency's dedication to "unfiltered dissemination of scientific information," advise that employees must maintain the public availability of the agency's science and research, including the website summaries removed on April 28, 2017.
- (3) Advise EPA staff, including Administrator Pruitt, that any employee who revises *or omits* scientific facts presented by the Agency in order to conform to the political views of managers is violating the Scientific Integrity Policy and subject to discipline.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to discuss our request or seek further information.

Sincerely,



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<sup>7</sup>Mooney & Eilperin, *supra* note 4 ("The page contains scientific explanations of climate change and its causes and consequences, and has existed in one form or another since at least 1997.").