Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 9, 2005

Mr. David M. Walker
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

Yesterday, the *New York Times* reported that a top White House official, former oil industry lobbyist Phillip A. Cooney, has reviewed and altered government scientific reports on global warming. According to the *Times*, Mr. Cooney has "repeatedly edited government climate reports in ways that play down links between [greenhouse] emissions and global warming, according to internal documents."[1]

In addition to altering documents, political appointees dictated government climate research priorities, according to a government whistle-blower, Rick Piltz, former Senior Associate with the U.S. Climate Change Science Policy Office and former Associate Director of the U.S. Global Change Research Program. Mr. Piltz resigned in protest in March 2005.[2] He states, "The White House so successfully politicized the science program that it was impossible for me to carry out my duties with integrity."

We are writing to request that the Government Accountability Office investigate these serious allegations.

The *Times* article reported on numerous documents where Mr. Cooney's edits changed scientific conclusions made by government and academic researchers. For example, the U.S. Climate Change Science Program regularly compiles and transmits to Congress a report on the program's research activities entitled "Our Changing Planet." In an October 2002 draft of this report, Mr. Cooney deleted as "speculative" a summary of findings by government climate researchers that climate change had been projected to reduce mountain glaciers and snowpack. Similarly, Mr. Cooney systematically changed language to introduce uncertainty in affirmative statements (e.g., changing "is" to "may") and to amplify references to uncertainty made by scientists (e.g., adding "extremely" to a statement indicating that an attribution is difficult). According to the *New York Times*, Mr. Cooney is a lawyer with a bachelor's degree in economics who has no scientific training.

Unfortunately, the incidents reported by the *Times* are simply the latest in a pattern of interference with climate science by the Bush Administration. This pattern is evident across

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[1] *Bush Aide Softened Greenhouse Gas Links to Global Warming*, New York Times (June 8, 2005).

[2] Personal Statement of Rick Piltz (June 8, 2005).

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government agencies. For example, early in the Administration, ExxonMobil successfully lobbied the White House to oppose the re-appointment of a leading U.S. climatologist to chair the preeminent international global warming study panel.[3] The State Department complied, giving no scientific rationale for its opposition to Dr. Robert Watson. Lacking the support of his own country in an election to an international body, Dr. Watson was not re-appointed.

Dr. James E. Hansen, a world-renowned climatology expert at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, was told by NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe not to talk about "dangerous anthropogenic interference" with the climate.[4] Dr. Hansen has publicly objected to what he views as the Administration's unprecedented screening of information flow from scientists to the public.[5]

Other examples include changes made by the White House or agency political appointees that distorted scientific findings and summaries in reports, articles, and press releases from EPA, NASA, and NOAA addressing climate change.[6]

We request that the Government Accountability Office investigate the extent to which White House officials and political appointees at federal agencies have interfered with federally funded science on global warming. Specifically, we request that GAO:

- Review and evaluate the changes made or requested by White House officials to documents produced by federal agencies that relate to climate change;
- Review and evaluate the changes made or requested by political appointees at federal agencies to documents produced by federal agencies that relate to climate change;
- Review and evaluate any efforts by White House officials or political appointees at federal agencies to influence the direction of federally funded science related to climate change.

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[3] *Battle over IPCC Chair Renews Debate on U.S. Climate Policy*, Science (Apr. 12, 2002).

[4] *NASA Expert Criticizes Bush on Global Warming Policy*, New York Times (Oct. 26, 2004).

[5] *Putting Some Heat on Bush, Scientist Inspires Anger, Awe for Challenges on Global Warming*, New York Times (Jan. 19, 2005).

[6] *See, e.g.*, Jeremy Symons, *How Bush and Co. Obscure the Science*, Washington Post (July 13, 2003); *Report by E.P.A. Leaves out Data on Climate Change*, New York Times (June 19, 2003); *Bush vs. the Laureates: How Science Became a Partisan Issue*, New York Times (Oct. 19, 2004).

- Review and evaluate other efforts, if any, made by White House officials or political appointees to interfere with federally funded science related to climate change.

We look forward to consulting with you about this important request.

Sincerely,

John F. Kerry
U.S. Senator

Henry A. Waxman
Member of Congress