

Inspector General Criticizes Suppression of Science by Political Appointees

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By ANDREW C. REVKIN

Two years after James E. Hansen, the leading climate scientist at NASA, and other agency employees described a pattern of distortion and suppression of climate science by political appointees, the agency's inspector general has concluded that such activities occurred and were "inconsistent" with the law that established the space program 50 years ago.

In a 48-page report issued on Monday as a result of a request in 2006 by 14 senators, the internal investigative office said the activities appeared limited to the headquarters press office.

No evidence was found showing that officials higher at NASA or in the Bush administration were involved in interfering with the release of climate science information, the report said.

It also credited Michael Griffin, the agency administrator, for swiftly ordering a review and policy changes when the pattern came to light after articles in The New York Times early in 2006.

The report, signed by Kevin H. Winters, assistant inspector general for investigations, criticized what it said was a sustained pattern of activities, largely supervised by senior political appointees, that included muting or withholding news releases on global warming and, at least in Dr. Hansen's case, limiting a scientist's interactions with reporters.

"Our investigation," the report said, "found that during the fall of 2004 through early 2006, the NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs managed the topic of climate change in a manner that reduced, marginalized or mischaracterized climate change science made available to the general public."

The report said most evidence supported contentions that politics was "inextricably interwoven" into operations at the public affairs office in that period and that the pattern was inconsistent with the statutory responsibility to communicate findings widely, "especially on a topic that has worldwide scientific interest."

A NASA spokesman, Michael Cabbage, said: "The issues mentioned in the inspector general's report are more than two years old, and after learning of those issues, NASA revised the agency's policy for disseminating science information."

Dean Acosta, who was deputy assistant administrator for public affairs at the agency when the problems surfaced, sharply attacked the credibility of the report. Mr. Acosta was appointed by President Bush in 2003 and resigned in 2007.

"My entire career has been dedicated to open and honest communications," Mr. Acosta, who now is director of communications for the Boeing space-exploration business, wrote in an e-mail message. "The inspector general's assertions are patently false. The report itself does nothing but raise questions about a three-year investigation that has yielded nothing but flimsy allegations aimed at hard-working public servants."

Senator Frank R. Lautenberg, the New Jersey Democrat who wrote the request for the inquiry, had a markedly different reaction.

"Global warming is the most serious environmental threat we face, but this report is more evidence that the Bush administration's appointees have put political ideology ahead of science," Mr. Lautenberg said in an e-mailed statement. "Our government's response to global warming must be based on science, and the Bush administration's manipulation of that information violates the public trust."

John Schwartz contributed reporting.

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