

Union of Concerned Scientists

Science for a Healthy Planet and Safer World

[en español](#)

The White House Suppressed Science from Congressional Testimony



What happened: White House officials stopped a senior analyst at the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research from submitting scientific information on climate change in a written testimony to the House Intelligence Committee. State Department officials had previously refused to carry out the White House's orders to excise references to the federal scientific findings on climate change, leading the White House to bar the entire testimony from being submitted to Congress. Eventually, White House officials from the Office of Legislative Affairs allowed the senior analyst, Rod Schoonover, to testify in front of Congress but they forbade scientific information to be included in Schoonover's written testimony that was submitted for the record.

Why it matters: Suppressing scientific evidence from being submitted by government researchers sends a chilling message to other federal scientific staff: if you speak publicly on the science of climate change, there is a possibility that we will muzzle you. The core purpose of a congressional

hearing is to collect and analyze information that will aid in future legislative policymaking efforts and this cannot be done when information is stricken from record. The White House has denied Congress, and indeed the American people, access to important scientific information on how climate-related impacts could exacerbate existing national security risks.

First reported by the [Washington Post](#), the White House stopped State Department analyst Rod Schoonover from submitting written testimony to the House Intelligence Committee primarily because White House officials objected to the inclusion of scientific information on climate change. The scientific information in the written testimony came from respected international bodies like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and science-based federal agencies like the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). While the White House routinely reviews written congressional testimony from agency officials before they submit it, the deletion and blocking of basic scientific fact from the written testimony may be [unprecedented](#). Schoonover's testimony had offered evidence that was well grounded in decades worth of [robust science and widely accepted assessments](#), such as "The Earth's climate is unequivocally undergoing a long-term warming trend as established by decades of scientific measurements from multiple, independent lines of evidence." White House officials vehemently objected to such scientific statements. One of the comments given by the White House's National Security Council on [page 1](#) read that "this is not objective testimony at all... I am embarrassed to have this go out on behalf of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government."

One White House official claimed that the reason for blocking the written testimony from the record was because it did not "[jibe](#)" with what the Trump administration was seeking to do on climate change. According to an email obtained by the [New York Times](#), Daniel Q. Greenwood, deputy assistant to the president in the White House office of legislative affairs, went even further – he claimed that the testimony was being blocked in part because of its focus on science. "The testimony still has serious concerns with internal components and focuses heavily on the science. Because it doesn't reflect the coordinated IC [intelligence community's] position, or the administration's position, there is no way this can be cleared ahead of the hearing."

Objections to the scientific portions of Rod Schoonover's testimony came from officials at the White House's Office of Legislative Affairs, Office of Management and Budget, and National Security Council. One of the critics was William Happer, a National Security Council senior director, a [prominent climate science denier](#), and the co-founder of a climate denial group funded by the [Koch Industries](#). Happer has previously taken the extreme stance that more carbon dioxide will actually benefit society and he attempted to create a White House panel to [challenge the scientific consensus](#) that human activity is driving climate change. Recent emails show that Happer previously reached out to the rightwing thinktank, the [Heartland Institute](#), to challenge the idea that climate change represents a serious threat.

In the testimony, the White House's National Security Council claimed multiple times that the consensus reached among climate change scientists – that [climate change](#) is real and is causing detrimental effects – is nothing more than "[climate-alarm propaganda](#)." Scientific citations that came from NOAA and NASA were criticized and the two scientific agencies were accused of funding 30

years of climate alarm. Two sections of the testimony, entitled the “Scientific Baseline” and the “Stresses to Human and Societal Systems,” which had laid the scientific foundations for how certain national security threats were linked to climate change, were completely removed. Despite the fact that the congressional hearing where this testimony was to be submitted at was called “The National Security Implications of Climate Change,” these two sections were considered by the White House’s Office of Legislative Affairs “as not directly address[ing] the hearing topic.” Disturbingly, the White House seemed to justify this suppression of science by implying that scientists are prone to reporting lies and propaganda. For instance, the White House’s National Security Council said that “a consensus of peer reviewed literature has nothing to do with truth,” that a graph produced by NASA was “fiddled with” in order “to give the appearance of alarming warming,” and that the widely accepted scientific finding concerning [tipping points](#) is “a propaganda slogan designed to frighten the scientifically illiterate.”

According to senior military and intelligence officials, climate change represents a serious threat to national security. As said by Schoonover during his verbal testimony to the House Intelligence Committee, “Climate change effects could undermine important international systems on which the U.S. is critically dependent, such as trade routes, food and energy supplies, the global economy and domestic stability abroad.” The White House ignores and suppresses scientific information at the American people’s peril for it is them that will pay the price for this.

Last Revised Date: June 19, 2019

Union of Concerned Scientists

Science for a Healthy Planet and Safer World

Science for a healthy planet and safer world



- A Normal Font Size
- A Larger Font Size
- A Largest Font Size

We use cookies so that you will have the best possible experience on our website. By continuing to use our site, you accept our use of cookies for site features. Learn more in our [privacy policy](#). UCS is a 501c(3) organization

I ACCEPT