



All presidents over the past two decades have nudged science to support their policies, but a report out of N.Y.U. said the Trump administration has driven federal science to a “crisis point.”



By **Lisa Friedman**

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WASHINGTON — In a single month in 2017, the Trump administration’s Environmental Protection Agency blocked scientists from speaking at a climate change conference, its Interior Department forwarded a policy letter to U.S. Customs and Border Protection only after deleting concerns from biologists about a border wall’s effects on wildlife, and the F.B.I. issued a crime report that omitted dozens of tables of data on homicides and arrests.

That October was fairly typical for the Trump administration, according to a new report out of New York University, led by Preet Bharara, a former United States attorney, and Christine Todd Whitman, who led the E.P.A. for George W. Bush.

Every president over the past two decades has, to some degree, undermined research and injected politics into science, the report said. But, it concluded, “Now, we are at a crisis point, with almost weekly violations of previously respected safeguards.” The report calls for stringent new standards to enshrine scientific independence.

The study, to be formally released on Thursday, follows reports that President Trump's acting chief of staff, Mick Mulvaney, pressured the commerce secretary to rebuke weather forecasters who appeared to contradict the president after he erroneously claimed a recent hurricane could affect Alabama. Earlier this summer a State Department intelligence analyst resigned in protest after the White House tried to edit scientific testimony about climate change and then blocked it from being entered into the permanent Congressional Record. For months the White House debated a plan to publicly question the established scientific conclusions about the severity of climate change.

On October 13, 2017, the Interior Department sent a supportive letter to border patrol officials considering Mr. Trump's proposed wall along the southwestern frontier, but deleted concerns by scientists about the harm that a physical structure could cause the habitats of rare cats and other wildlife in the area, according to the report. A few days later the E.P.A. barred three agency scientists from speaking at a conference in Rhode Island about the effects of climate change on the Narragansett Bay. A week after that the F.B.I. issued its annual report of crime data with 70 percent fewer data tables. The changes, according to a report at the time, did not go through the normal review process.

"Policies governing the health and welfare of the public and of our shared environment have to be based in credible, independent science," Ms. Whitman said in emailed remarks. "For the public to lose faith in that process will call into question everything that has been done to make our drugs and food safe and our environment healthier."

The authors maintain that, without action from Congress, future administrations of either party could further erode the independence of federal scientific data. Among the changes it recommended was

legislation to require that all federal agencies that perform scientific research articulate clear standards for, and report on, how political officials interact with career scientists.

While that seems like a long shot in the current Congress, where even the definition of scientific integrity is in dispute, the authors said they are optimistic that rules governing scientific advisory bodies could earn bipartisan support. Legislation by Representative Paul Tonko, Democrat of New York, to develop scientific integrity standards has 217 co-sponsors, but none are Republican.

“There’s truth and there’s science, and that shouldn’t be swayed by whether someone is a liberal or a conservative, a Democrat or a Republican,” Mr. Bharara said in an interview.

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