



Trump Fires NOAA's Chief Scientist In Fear Of 5th National Climate Assessment

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What happens when you're NOAA's chief scientist, and you ask Trump political appointees around you to acknowledge the agency's scientific integrity policy?

You're removed from your position. That's what happens.

Craig McLean, chief scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), has been forced out from the position by Erik Noble, a former White House policy adviser who had just been appointed NOAA's chief of staff. What was at contention? The NOAA policy which prohibits manipulating research or presenting ideologically driven findings.

Have you read Orwell's *1984*? That's what the atmosphere is like right now at NOAA. All internal and external communications must be approved by political staff at the department at least 3 days before being issued. The restrictions applied to social media posts, news releases, and even agency-wide emails.

What's at stake is transparency within the upcoming National Climate Assessment.

The Trump administration has pulled NOAA's chief scientist as well as installed new political staff who question accepted facts about climate change. The shift opens up stricter controls on communications at the agency.

"The real issue at play is the National Climate Assessment," commented Judith Curry, a former chair of the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology. "That's what the powers that be are trying to influence." Curry, one of climate science's most vocal critics, left academia in 2017 because of what she **called** the poisonous discourse of "climate alarmists" around human-caused global warming.

What is the National Climate Assessment?

The US Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) began in 1989 with a **mandate** to develop and coordinate "a comprehensive and integrated United States research program which will assist the Nation and the world to understand, assess, predict, and respond to human-induced and natural processes of global change." A Strategic Plan is intended to connect fundamental human and Earth system research with the translation and dissemination of credible and authoritative information.

The **most recent report**, released in 2018, determined that the climate crisis poses an imminent and dire threat to the US and its economy. At that time, Trump **allowed** he had read only some of the report but didn't "believe it."

Development of the Fifth National Climate Assessment (**NCA5**) is currently underway, with anticipated delivery in 2023. The report will analyze the impacts of global change in the US. The development of NCA5 is overseen by a Federal Steering Committee appointed by the Subcommittee on Global Change Research (SGCR) and comprising representatives from USGCRP agencies. NOAA, as the administrative agency for NCA5, is responsible for establishing procedures for the report, releasing Federal Register Notices, and certifying the report meets Information Quality Act and Evidence Act standards.

The process is designed to be "transparent and inclusive," and that's where the brakes squealed in the Trump administration.

As early as 2016, we at *CleanTechnica* were writing about the Republican candidates' lust for **fossil fuel donations**, foreshadowing how a President Trump would enact "what is essentially the worst energy policy in the history of US presidential elections. It is 100% about promoting deadly fossil fuels."

That vision has not only come to pass, it is now influencing the **future of scientific thought** if Trump is to be re-elected. *Vanity Fair* **calls** McLean's firing as NOAA's chief scientist and other recent events at NOAA "a grim preview of what a second Trump term would look like for government-funded climate research."

What NOAA's Chief Scientist Asked & Why It Cost Him His Job

The lead-in to McLean's ouster is fascinating, as **reported** by the *New York Times*.

When McLean asked Noble to acknowledge NOAA's scientific integrity policy, Noble responded, "Respectfully, by what authority are you sending this to me?"

The intent of NOAA's scientific integrity **policy** is to:

"... strengthen widespread confidence – from scientists, to decision-makers, to the general public – in the quality, validity, and reliability of NOAA science and to denote the agency's commitment to a culture of support for excellence of NOAA's principal science asset, its employees."

McLean replied that upholding the policy was a primary role of his position as NOAA's chief scientist.

That answer was the clang of demise.

Noble responded, "You no longer serve as the acting chief scientist for NOAA." Mentioning that a new chief scientist had already been appointed, he added, "Thank you for your service." McLean's replacement, Ryan Maue, is a former researcher for the libertarian Cato Institute; he has criticized climate scientists for what he sees as unnecessarily dire predictions.

The memo of this exchange has been widely distributed throughout NOAA.

Andrew Rosenberg, who served as a deputy director at NOAA in former President Bill Clinton's administration and who now runs the Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists, **said** the political appointments could be a strategic way to get climate denialists "burrowed" in at NOAA. If the political appointees are offered career positions, they will be much harder to dismiss after Trump is gone because of protections for federal workers.

"They're packing these positions, and I'm worried they're going to get burrowed into career positions in NOAA. First of all, getting appointed in the first place is sending a very strong signal that we are not interested in the overall scientific evidence of climate change; we're going to go with the view of the fringe. That's very distressing, not only to climate change, but everything NOAA does."

If Trump wins re-election, further changes at NOAA could include replacing experienced writers of the climate assessment with climate deniers who question how much the world is really warming and if it is, in fact, caused by human activities. They'd sweep under the proverbial rug the danger that the climate crisis is to health, safety, and the economy.

NOAA & the Trump Administration — A Relationship Fraught with Conflict

NOAA and the Trump administration have clashed in several ways prior to this firing.

Emails **show** officials at NOAA told the agency's scientists it did "not approve or support" a controversial agency statement issued after the president falsely said that Alabama was at risk from Hurricane Dorian.

In 2018, the Union of Concerned Scientists and the Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology at Iowa State University **surveyed** more than 63,000 federal scientists in 16 government agencies, including NOAA. These federal scientists felt that:

- NOAA adheres to its scientific integrity policies.
- The agency should do more to create a work environment in which scientists feel free to conduct and communicate independent science without inappropriate pressure from decision makers.
- Business interests — and officials who come from industry — have inappropriately influenced agency decisions.

Democracy Forward has sued the Trump administration to force the release of public documents they believe will shed light on politicization of science at NOAA. The **suit** compels the administration to release requested public documents related to the removal of Tim Gallaudet from his position as acting administrator of NOAA in 2019.

Jane Lubchenco, a NOAA administrator in the Obama administration, has weighed in on the NOAA upheavals. "I think that until recently NOAA has been mostly spared the political interference with science that we've seen as a hallmark across this administration."

Yet Lubcehco recognizes that recent key scientists' removal have the potential to undermine the work of the organization. "That integrity and the credibility that it brings are threatened by these recent appointments. The positions that these individuals are in gives them the perfect opportunity to suppress, distort, and cherry-pick information to make it whatever the party line is."