



‘Grotesque disinformation’: Trump official fakes White House approval on papers that downplay climate crisis

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A senior official in the Trump administration may have violated US law by publishing papers downplaying the climate crisis with an unapproved use of the presidential seal and claim of federal copyright.

Titled “The Climate Change Flyers”, the papers claim to be published by the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and include an introduction by Dr David Legates, who was appointed to a senior role at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) by the Trump administration last year.

Dr Legates is a professor of climatology at the University of Delaware and affiliated with the Heartland Institute which worked for the tobacco industry in the Nineties and now opposes mainstream science.

He is also a signatory of the “Oregon Petition” which claims “there is no convincing scientific evidence” that humans are driving the release of greenhouse gases that are heating the planet and causing the climate crisis.

The papers were published on a non-government website for the Center for Environmental Research and Earth Sciences (CERES). ^[1]_[SEP]The “flyers” are branded in the top corner with the seal of the Executive Office of the President and indicate they are copyrighted by OSTP.

However Kristina Baum, OSTP Communications Director, tweeted on Monday: “These papers were not created at the direction of The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy nor were they cleared or approved by OSTP leadership.”

OSTP did not reply when asked by *The Independent* whether Dr Legates had been ordered to remove the fake endorsements. Dr Legates did not respond to emails from *The Independent*.

Dr Peter Gleick, a world-renowned expert on climate and water issues and a member of the US National Academy of Sciences, described the essays as "grotesque disinformation & pseudoscience".

“I call on the @CommerceGov, @NOAA, and @WHOSTP to immediately fire David Legates and repudiate the unreviewed, unauthorized, and unapproved #climate denying pseudoscience essays just published illegally with White House logos and OSTP "copyright" claims," he tweeted on Tuesday.

In his introduction to the papers, Dr Legates claims that they were, “written by top scientists from leading institutions from around North America” and are a discussion of “how much of anthropogenic effects of climate change must be taken as a matter of faith”.

He claimed that the “Office of Science and Technology Policy is pleased to bring you these briefs to further your understanding of climate change”.

One featured author, Dr Roy Spencer, another Heartland member and climate research scientist at the University of Alabama, posted the collection to his blog last Friday. In his paper he claims that climate change could be mostly “natural”.

On his blog, he wrote: “Late last year, several of us were asked by David Legates (White House Office of Science and Technology Policy) to write short, easily understandable brochures that supported the general view that there is no climate crisis or climate emergency, and pointing out the widespread misinformation being promoted by alarmists through the media.

He continued: “David hopes to be able to get these posted on the White House website by January 20 (I presume so they will become a part of the outgoing Administration’s record) but there is no guarantee given recent events.

“He said we are free to disseminate them widely. I list them in no particular order. We all thank David for taking on a difficult job in more hostile territory that you might imagine.”

The nine papers include dubious proposals by climate science deniers including Dr William Happer who puts forward a theory on “radiation transfer” to explain why a climate emergency doesn’t exist.

“In fact, more carbon dioxide (CO₂) has already contributed to greater yields of agriculture and forests, and still more carbon dioxide will bring more benefits,” wrote Dr Happer, who served for a time on Trump's National Security Council.

Another paper, on the four National Assessments of Climate Change conducted by the US government, is written by Dr. Patrick J. Michaels, a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute “a conservative advocacy group based in DC which has undertaken an aggressive campaign to convince the public that global warming is uncertain” according to Greenpeace.

Dr Michaels’ paper calls the NCAs the “most egregious distortions of science in service of policy that have ever been published”.

The NCAs are federal reports vetted by 13 federal agencies and involve input from more than 300 experts.

Other papers sow doubt around computer modeling and the links between global heating and hurricanes. The latter is by Dr Ryan Maue, a former adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, a think-tank co-founded by billionaire Charles Koch, who made a fortune in the fossil fuel industry.

Dr Maue became NOAA’s chief scientist in September, then moved to OSTP in November according to the *Washington Post*.

While Dr Maue acknowledges that human activities have contributed to climate change, on social media and in op-eds, he regularly criticizes “climate alarmists” and tough policy measures to tackle the global crisis.

Neither Dr Legates and Dr Maue are expected to remain in their positions when president-elect Biden takes office.

The CERES website states that it is a “multi-disciplinary and independent research group” with the aim to “address important issues in the fields of environmental and earth sciences”.

CERES did not respond to *The Independent* seeking comment on the “Climate Flyers” or whether any of its papers have been peer-reviewed.

It is also unclear how the “climate flyers” were funded. The site includes a link to a PayPal account to fund its work, saying “in our view, scientific research works best when it is independent from industry, government, religion, politics or ideology” - despite bearing the presidential seal on the “climate flyers”.

The decision to falsely brand the papers could infringe upon the US legal code. It states that "whoever fraudulently or wrongfully affixes or impresses the seal of any department or agency of the United States" to items including certificates, documents, or papers "shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than five years, or both".