



Written by [JKelly](#) on June 4, 2018

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Correction Please: Greens, Leftists See Red Over EPA Transparency

Item: *The New York Times for March 26 reported that the Environmental Protection Agency was then “considering a major change to the way it assesses scientific work, a move that would severely restrict the research available to it when writing environmental regulations.”*

Under the proposed policy, the EPA “would no longer consider scientific research unless the underlying raw data can be made public for other scientists and industry groups to examine. As a result, regulators crafting future rules would quite likely find themselves restricted from using some of the most consequential environmental research of recent decades, such as studies linking air pollution to premature deaths or work that measures human exposure to pesticides and other chemicals.”

The reason behind this, said the newspaper, is that “these fields of research often require personal health information for thousands of individuals, who typically agree to participate only if the details of their lives are kept confidential.”

“The proposed new policy ... is championed by the E.P.A. administrator, Scott Pruitt, who has argued that releasing the raw data would let others test the scientific findings more thoroughly.”

According to the Times, critics say that “Mr. Pruitt’s goal is not academic rigor, but to undermine much of the science that underpins modern environmental regulations governing clean water and clean air.”

Item: *An op-ed was published in the New York Times on March 26, entitled “Scott Pruitt’s Attack on Science Would Paralyze the E.P.A.” It was written by Gina McCarthy, the EPA administrator from 2013 to 2017, and Janet McCabe, who was acting assistant administrator of the EPA’s Office of Air and Radiation from 2013 to 2017. Pruitt, they wrote, “has announced that he alone will decide what is and isn’t acceptable science for the agency to use when developing policies that affect your health and the environment. It is his latest effort to cripple the agency.”*

These progressive activists and former Obama officials went on to say: “Opponents of the agency and of mainstream climate science call these studies ‘secret science.’ But that’s simply not true.”

They also asserted that “Mr. Pruitt’s goal is simple: No studies, no data, no rules. No climate science, for instance, means no climate policy.”

Item: *The London-based Economist, dated April 28-May 4, stated that this “new [EPA] policy is a costly solution in search of a problem. It is outlandish to think that scientists are engaged in a vast conspiracy to exaggerate the health consequences of water and air pollution using fabricated data.”*

Correction: Remember when liberals boasted that they were champions of government transparency? It seems like only yesterday. Barack Obama, for example, repeatedly pledged that he would run the most transparent administration in the history of the United States. (His actions belied his rosy words, but that is another matter.)

However, here is what now produced apoplexy among leftists: In April, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt signed a proposed rule to strengthen the science used in regulations issued by the agency. The rule, according to the EPA, will ensure that the regulatory science underlying the agency’s actions is fully transparent. It is also intended to guarantee that the scientific information is publicly available in a



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manner sufficient for independent validation.

Pruitt put it directly: “The era of secret science at EPA is coming to an end.”

His liberal opponents are beside themselves — exhibiting once again a propensity for “doublethink.” This is the act, as portrayed in George Orwell’s *1984*, of holding, simultaneously, two opposite, individually exclusive ideas or opinions and believing in both absolutely. (Examples are the “Ingsoc” slogans “War is Peace,” “Freedom is Slavery,” and “Ignorance is Strength.”)

To party-line leftists, “transparency” is whatever they want it to be — even official obscurity. For them, the open access of information is a fine principle, but it is not appropriate for their political or ideological adversaries. Former Obama EPA officials Gina McCarthy and Janet McCabe warned against being “fooled by this talk of transparency,” saying Pruitt is “setting up a nonexistent problem in order to prevent the EPA from using the best available science.”

This year’s move became a page-one story in the alarmed *Washington Post* for April 24. The left-wing paper said: A “chorus of scientists and public health groups warn that the rule would effectively block the EPA from relying on long-standing, landmark studies on the harmful effects of air pollution and pesticide exposure.”

A typical bit of the *Post*’s skewed coverage follows. “Conservatives,” maintain the paper, “such as Trump EPA transition team member Steve Milloy, have long tried to discredit independent research the agency used to justify limiting air pollution from burning coal and other fossil fuels.”

Milloy runs a website ([JunkScience.com](#)); he is a lawyer and author. He has a B.A. in Natural Sciences from Johns Hopkins University, a Master of Health Sciences in Biostatistics from the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health, a Juris Doctor from the University of Baltimore, and a Master of Laws from the Georgetown University Law Center. He has, as you might imagine, a different take than the *Post*. He took umbrage on his website — saying that his readers know, and “well-informed WaPo reporters should know,” that “the research in question is anything but ‘independent.’” Milloy elucidated:

The utterly fraudulent Harvard Six Cities and the Arden Pope/American Cancer Society-II lines of research not only were funded by the EPA, but they were then rubber-stamped into a basis for regulation by the corrupt, pal-review process known as the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee.

Harvard’s Doug Dockery, lead author of the Six Cities study, has shared in \$50,290,729 worth of grants from EPA.

Clive Arden Pope, III, lead author of the ACS-II line of studies, has shared in \$50,145,870 worth of grants from the EPA.

Both Dockery and Pope have been part of the processes for reviewing their work as members of the EPA Science Advisory Board, EPA Clean Air Act Science Advisory Committee and the EPA-funded Health Effects Institute.

This might be “independence” in Winston Smith’s world, but not ours. Or are we already in *1984*?

Keep in mind that the HONEST Act of 2017 (Republican-sponsored legislation on which Administrator Pruitt’s proposal is modeled) insisted: “Personally identifiable information, trade secrets, or commercial or financial information obtained from a person and privileged or confidential, shall be redacted prior to



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public availability.”

“Secret science” has been practiced for some time. Activists within and without the EPA in the 1990s sought to regulate fine particulate matter by citing dubious research; the EPA refused to reveal the underlying data.

Those same secret studies were used in EPA moves in 2011; this helped to thwart a move by Republicans in Congress who took exception to the anti-coal rules ginned up by Barack Obama’s EPA. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* (March 26, 2018), Milloy noted that, once again, “the EPA was defiant. Administrator Gina McCarthy refused requests for the data sets and defied a congressional subpoena.” As also noted in the *Journal*:

Bills to resolve the problem died in the Senate. Democrats argued that requiring data for study replication is a threat to intellectual property and an invasion of medical privacy. In fact, the legislation would protect property by requiring a confidentiality agreement, and no personal medical data or information would have been released.

Scientists are human; they are not disinterested parties. Should we then be astonished that some, perhaps many, can figure out where the butter comes for their bread? The well-known academic maxim “publish or perish” reflects the fact that unless you keep publishing, your job is at risk. And to say “liberal academia” is to be redundant. Can you guess what tends to get published? This tendency is why the National Association of Scholars (NAS) — whose members tend to be traditional and conservative — noted in a recent report that there is a “reproducibility crisis” that afflicts a “wide range of scientific and social-scientific disciplines.”

All too often government policymakers cite research — possibly flawed research — as part of justification for their rules. Yet, without access to the underlying data those studies might not be replicable. The phenomenon was mentioned in a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* (“How Bad Is the Government’s Science?”). It was written by Peter Wood, president of the National Association of Scholars, and David Randall, a co-author of the NAS’s new report “The Irreproducibility Crisis of Modern Science.” They are not alleging a “conspiracy” (the strawman argument proffered in the *Economist*, above).

Their case does, however, reveal some of the results of the lack of intellectual diversity in academe. Among their points:

The chief cause of irreproducibility may be that scientists, whether wittingly or not, are fishing fake statistical significance out of noisy data. If a researcher looks long enough, he can turn any fluke correlation into a seemingly positive result. But other factors compound the problem: Scientists can make arbitrary decisions about research techniques, even changing procedures partway through an experiment. They are susceptible to groupthink and aren’t as skeptical of results that fit their biases. Negative results typically go into the file drawer. Exciting new findings are a route to tenure and fame, and there’s little reward for replication studies.

The enemies of Pruitt’s proposal have declared that the EPA head is against peer review. Not so. That has been explained by John Tierney — who is a contributing editor of the Manhattan Institute’s *City Journal* and, astonishingly, also a contributing science columnist for the *New York Times*. (He has described himself as a “contrarian.”) As Tierney has noted, the EPA administrator has actually “done the opposite.” Pruitt “has called for the use of more independent experts to review the EPA’s research



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and has just announced that the agency would rely only on studies for which data are available to be shared. Yet Democratic officials and liberal journalists have denounced these moves as an ‘attack on science.’”

In a *City Journal* piece in April (“Scott Pruitt, Warrior for Science”), Tierney asks rhetorically:

How could “the party of science,” as Democrats like to call themselves, be opposed to transparency and peer review? Because better scientific oversight would make it tougher for the EPA to justify its costly regulations. To environmentalists, rigorous scientific protocols are fine in theory, but not in practice if they interfere with the green political agenda. As usual, the real war on science is the one waged from the left.

Pruitt’s enemies, says the columnist, maintain that “some worthwhile research will be ignored because it is based on confidential records that are impractical to share.”

Such critics also are, all of a sudden, very concerned about government spending. They say, as Tierney writes, “that it would cost the EPA several hundred million dollars to redact personal medical information in the air-pollution studies used to justify the Obama administration’s Clean Power Plan.” However, he goes on, “even if that estimate is correct — it seems awfully high — it’s a pittance compared with the costs of the EPA’s regulations. The Obama EPA estimated the annual cost of its Clean Power Plan alone at \$8 billion; others estimated it at more than \$30 billion.”

The matter of costs was also addressed in April by Angela Logomasini in *The Hill* newspaper (Washington, D.C.). Logomasini is a Ph.D. whose specialties include environmental risk and regulation. As she put it, leftist detractors of the proposal have made the case that these “transparency requirements are anti-science.” She cites one who warns that compliance costs are too high, pointing to a Congressional Budget Office report that said implementing the HONEST Act would cost \$250 million a year, as the EPA would have to devote staff to removing confidential information from data. Even if true, this is a modest amount, given that EPA regulations cost around \$394 billion a year, according to estimates developed by Clyde Wayne Crews in [his Competitive Enterprise Institute report “10,000 Commandments”].

In thinking about this controversy, keep in mind those who are in favor of unjustified secrecy when it comes to establishing government policies. These are the aims of political leftists, even as they aver that they are the true defenders of science.

As Texas Congressman Lamar Smith has put it: “For too long, the EPA has issued rules and regulations based on data that has been withheld from the American people.” In contrast, the current EPA objective is to halt having decisions made behind closed doors, where the necessary information is accessible only to those who write the regulations.



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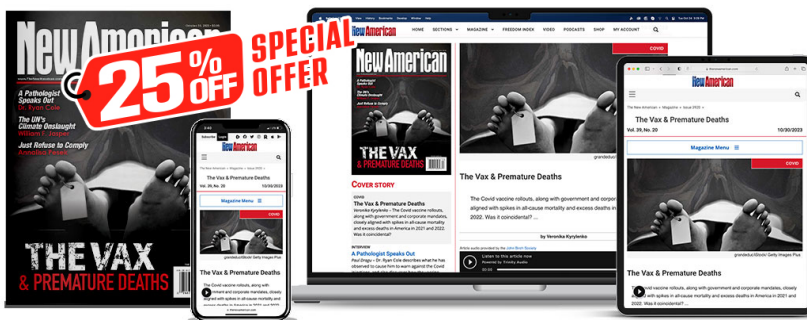
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