

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SUITE 2320 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301
(202) 225-6375
TTY: (202) 226-4410
<http://science.house.gov>

March 9, 2007

Mr. Dick Kempthorne
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Kempthorne:

Yesterday, I was surprised to learn that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was attempting to muzzle one of its scientists from participating in a full discussion of conserving Arctic animals and plants at an international conference to be held in Norway. In February 26 and 27 memoranda entitled "Foreign Travel Clarification" to FWS Director H. Dale Hall from the Region 7 acting director, Mr. Hall was advised that Dr. Janet E. Hohn, an expert in Arctic conservation, understood "the administration's position on climate change, polar bears and sea ice and will not be speaking on or responding to these issues."¹

Dr. Hohn is scheduled to attend the Arctic Council's Senior Arctic Officials meeting. The Council is an intergovernmental organization to address the common concerns of the countries and peoples of Arctic regions. It describes environmental monitoring and assessment as a key element of its agenda and has been able to attract global attention to the state of the Arctic environment. She is also meeting with the Norwegian representative of the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group, but will not be allowed to speak or respond to any conversation about climate change, polar bears and sea ice in that meeting.²

This "clarification" appears to be the latest effort by the Bush Administration to block a full and free discussion of issues relating to climate change by the scientific community, despite the President's recent acknowledgement that global warming was an issue that needed to be addressed. The memos from the Region 7 acting director were apparently in response to an Administration-wide directive on foreign travel that forces scientists and other experts to censor their discussions about climate change, polar bears and sea ice at international conferences.

Director Hall stated to the press that the memos were written to assure that U.S. conference participants talked about "only what was on the agenda."³ To even a layman, it

¹ "Memos Tell Officials How to Discuss Climate," *The New York Times*, Marc 8, 2007, A13

² "Foreign Travel Clarification - Janet E. Hohn - Norway," Memorandum from Regional Director - Region 7 to FWS Director, February 27, 2007.

³ "U.S. Bars Talk of Climate Change Effects on Bears," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 9, 2007

seems hard to conceive of how any conference could address the conservation of Arctic animals and plants without discussing the reasons why there is so much concern about their survival. As we all know, one of the most critical factors in the survival of Arctic animals, such as polar bears, and Arctic plants, are the changes in the sea ice and the melting of permafrost, both of which are caused by global warming. Understanding the scope and projected time frames of global warming is obviously essential to a full and free discussion of how to conserve these species. In fact, it is inconceivable that any discussion could be held without addressing climate change and its effects in the Arctic on sea ice and permafrost, which cover the vast majority of the Arctic environment.

Additionally, another Fish and Wildlife Service employee, who is to talk to villagers on the Siberian coast of Russia about how to avoid encounters with polar bears, was told that he also could not talk about climate change or the loss of sea ice, both of which are obvious causes of the increasing encounters of humans with hungry bears foraging for food. A logical topic of discussion would have to be whether these encounters should be expected to increase and the cause of the increase. Again, if no discussion of climate change and the resulting loss of polar ice is allowed, his advice to these villagers would be of limited utility.

Pursuant to Rules X and XI of the United States House of Representatives, the Committee on Science and Technology is delegated "the function of reviewing and studying, on a continuing basis, all laws, programs, and Government activities dealing with or involving nonmilitary research and development." Committee Rule 3(a)(5) authorizes the Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight to carry out "general and special investigative and oversight authority on all matters within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Science and Technology."

Therefore, by this letter, I am requesting that you provide copies of the following records (as defined in the Appendix) to the Subcommittee:

1. The Region 7 document entitled "Subject Foreign Travel – New Requirements – Please Review and Comply."
2. All documents relating to foreign travel issued by the Department of the Interior or any of its subdivisions from January 1, 2007, to the present.
3. All records relating to foreign travel and climate change, polar bears and/or sea ice from January 1, 2006, to the present.
4. All communications received from any federal office, agency or the White House concerning climate change, polar bears and/or sea ice from January 1, 2006, to the present.
5. All records relating to the Administration's policies on climate change, polar bears and sea ice from January 1, 2006, to the present.
6. All records relating to the negotiation and finalization of the Arctic Council's Senior Arctic Officials meeting agenda.

Please provide these records to the offices of the Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight, B-374 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. by 5 p.m. on Friday, March 23, 2007. If your staff has any questions or needs additional information, please contact Edith Holleman, Subcommittee counsel, at (202) 225-8459, or Dan Pearson, Subcommittee staff director, at (202) 225-4494.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



BART GORDON

Chairman

Committee on Science and Technology



BRAD MILLER

Chairman

Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight

cc: Ralph Hall
Ranking Member

cc: James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight