Elena Saxonhouse, Senior Attorney
Joanne Spalding, Chief Climate Counsel
Sierra Club-Environmental Law Program
2101 Webster Street, Suite 1300
Oakland, CA 94612

May 9, 2017

Dear Ms. Saxonhouse and Ms. Spalding:

Your allegation of a violation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Scientific Integrity Policy by Administrator Scott Pruitt has been referred to me by EPA's Office of Inspector General[1].

I shared your allegation with the EPA Scientific Integrity Committee, comprised of senior leaders representing the regions, offices and programs of EPA. From this Committee, a Scientific Integrity Review Panel was convened to review the circumstances surrounding Administrator Pruitt's comments and to compare those to the EPA Scientific Integrity Policy. This is consistent with established Coordination Procedures between the Scientific Integrity Official and the Office of Inspector General[2]

Our review was focused on the following text included in the EPA Scientific Integrity Policy[3]:

> *When an Agency employee substantively engaged in the science informing an Agency policy decision disagrees with the scientific data, scientific interpretations, or scientific conclusions that will be relied upon for said Agency decision, the employee is encouraged to express that opinion…*

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The Scientific Integrity Policy applies to all EPA employees, contractors, grantees, collaborators and student volunteers, including political appointees. The freedom to express one's opinion about science is fundamental to EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy even (and especially) when that point of view might be controversial.

The Scientific Integrity Policy explicitly protects differing opinions. This protection is afforded to any employee "substantively engaged in the science," including the Administrator when he speaks on matters of science "informing an Agency policy decision." The protection is forward-looking and is designed to encourage the employee to express his or her opinion if he or she "disagrees with the scientific data, scientific interpretations, or scientific conclusions that will be relied upon for said Agency decision."

In this case, the Administrator was asked a science-related question during a television interview, "Do you believe that it's been proven that carbon dioxide is the primary control knob for climate?" The Administrator responded, "No. I think that measuring with precision human activity on the climate is something very challenging to do and there's tremendous disagreement about the degree of impact. So no, I would not agree that it's a primary contributor to the global warming that we see. But we don't know that yet . . . We need to continue the debate and continue the review and the analysis."

[1] https://www.docdroid.net/HvDdJZs/sierra-club-scientific-integrity-complaint-3-14-17.pdf.html (last visited 4/4/17)
[2] https://intranet.ord.epa.gov/sites/default/files/media/oig-scio_coordination_procedures_final.pdf (last visited 4/4/17)
[3] https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-02/documents/scientific_integrity_policy_2012.pdf (last visited 4/4/17)

In his response, the Administrator expressed his opinion regarding contributors to global warming and called for more debate, review and analysis as a precursor to any future EPA policy decision on the matter. This expression of opinion, which was not made in a decisional context, does not violate EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy. We also note that the Administrator, in his televised remarks, did not suppress or alter Agency scientific findings.

Expressing an opinion about science is not a violation of the EPA Scientific Integrity Policy. Indeed, the Scientific Integrity Policy – in the spirit of promoting vigorous debate and inquiry – specifically encourages employees to express disagreement with scientific data, scientific interpretations, or scientific conclusions.

Thank you for your interest in this matter. Feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Francesca Grifo, EPA Scientific Integrity Official
The US EPA Scientific Integrity Committee

cc: Arthur Elkins, EPA Inspector General

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